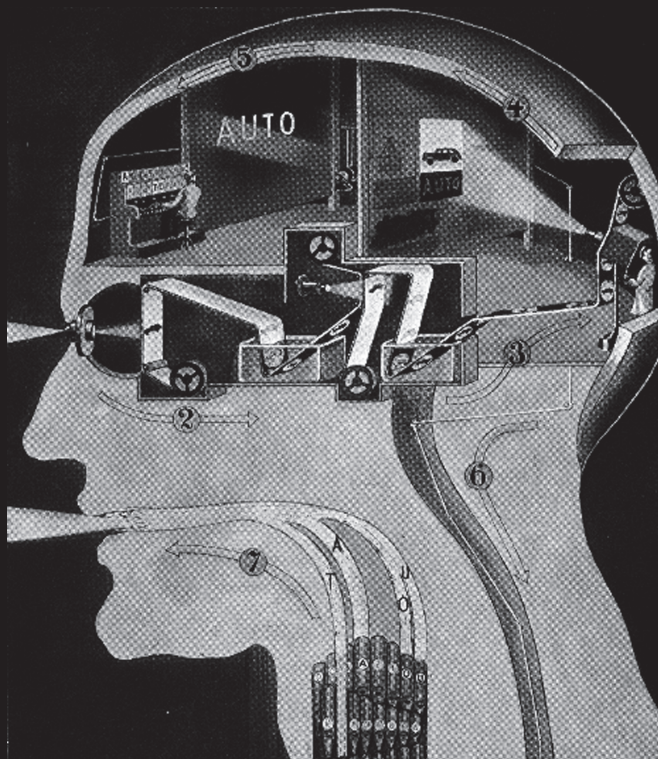Training perception with rebus films

Disney's cows and the modernist moment

Queering empire in the *Sissi* films

Cinema that *stays at home*

▄▖creen

Moving picture puzzles: training urban perception in the Weimar 'rebus films'

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Looking over the history of cinema from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, recent research has increasingly highlighted the similarities between the sense of possibility characterizing cinema's early decades and our own digital era, in which the proliferation of interactive media and variable screen formats has loosened the once dominant paradigm of the passive spectator immobilized in the illusory realm of Plato's cave.[1] As Tom Gunning long ago pointed out, however, while the dominance of narrative film and continuity editing might have marginalized other modes of spectatorship after 1910, it did not eliminate them.[2] Much recent work has thus involved an archaeology of those other models for interaction with moving images and the persistence of a more 'mobilized gaze', whether in alternative spaces such as the museum and the planetarium or within the space of the cinema itself.[3] In this essay, I shall focus on one such neglected model of alternative spectatorship from the Weimar era: namely the short-lived genre of the *Rebus-Film*, a series of short animated crossword puzzles by German director Paul Leni, scriptwriter Hans Brennert and cinematographer Guido Seeber, which ran in German theatres as a prelude to the main feature between 1925 and 1927. On one level, one might be tempted to read these filmic puzzles as the precursor to more recent interactive screen media; upon buying their tickets, spectators received puzzle cards which they filled out based on visual clues screened before the feature film and could check against the 'solutions' segment shown a week later (figure 1).[4] Of course, this 'interactive' format, while participational to a certain extent, clearly differed from later varieties by its lack of a two-way interface: unlike input

Drittes Kreuzwort-Rätsel im Film

Von oben nach unten:
1. Beliebte Erscheinung
2. Ein Erdteil
3. Etwas Unbeständiges

Von links nach rechts:
4. Verbindungsmittel
5. Männlicher Vorname
6. Künstlergattung

Fig. 1. Card from *Rebus-Film Nr. 3*.
Courtesy of the Deutsche
Kinemathek.

5 Koebner's film was shown in four parts in 1926. According to one laudatory review, the films consisted mostly of shots of legs dangling from a bench and performing various moves in slow motion, so that spectators in the cinema could imitate the filmic images from their seats. See '1000 Schritte Charleston', *Süddeutsche Filmzeitung*, 14 January 1927, n.p.

6 *Rebus-Film No. 1* (Paul Leni, Hans Brennert and Guido Seeber, 1928). *Avantgarde 2,* disc 2 (DVD, Kino Entertainment, 2007).

devices such as joysticks or keypads, the puzzle cards filled out by spectators of the rebus films did not affect what happened on the screen. Rather, in the manner of other educational shorts such as Franz Koebner's series *1000 Schritte Charleston*/*1000 Steps of the Charleston*, a series of filmic dance lessons shown in German theatres in 1926, the rebus films employed a stimulus-and-response format to solicit prescribed activities (namely puzzle-solving) from spectators.[5]

In constructing such an 'interactive' format, moreover, the rebus films also borrowed heavily from early attractions cinema; not unlike the film lecturer of previous decades, the rebus films' animated presenter, Mr Rebus, addresses the audience directly as he shows them 'views' of various people, places, things and events.[6] Indeed, this assortment of non-narrative attractions made up a good part of these films' appeal. In the months before the first film in the series – *Rebus-Film Nr. 1* – was released, advertisements reported on Seeber's progress in recording footage from around the world and boasted about the limitless possibilities of virtual travel afforded by the films. As one enthusiastic

writer describes it in an advertisement printed in the journal *Der Kinematograph*:

> The crossword puzzle films will show everything the world has to offer. In a colourful mosaic of images, audiences will see primeval forests of India, extravagant locales of the modern metropolis and historical figures from bygone times. From the cherry blossoms of Japan to the boxing matches of Hans Breitensträter, from Caesar to Hindenburg, from romantic mediaeval villages to Mount Everest – the crossword puzzles will show *everything* on film.[7]

Although the finished films of the series did not include precisely the list of people and places named here, this description is nonetheless accurate in a general sense; in the first film alone we see images ranging from snake charmers in India to street scenes from Paris and Berlin. More importantly, with its emphasis on *showing* (rather than narrating), the advertisement clearly inscribes the pleasures of the rebus film within a well-founded tradition of attractions cinema stretching back to the Lumières' views of distant locations.

In Weimar, such attractions found their continuation in *Kulturfilme* (cultural and educational films) such as Colin Ross's *Mit dem Kurbelkasten um die Erde*/*Around the World with a Movie Camera* (1925), which took audiences on a virtual world tour through the USA, Japan, China and East Asia, as well as several narrative films that integrated multiple sequences from various exotic settings, such as Fritz Lang's *Der müde Tod*/*Destiny* (1922) or Leni's own *Wachsfigurenkabinett*/*Waxworks* (1924).[8] In the rebus films, such attractions of locale were matched, moreover, by attractions of filmic technology itself; already known for his virtuoso camerawork in films such as *Der Student von Prag*/*The Student of Prague* (1913) and *Lebende Buddhas*/*Living Buddhas* (1922), Seeber used the rebus films to vaunt the wide array of trick effects in use in the mid 1920s, including (in the first film alone) fast and slow motion, animation, rapid camera movement, backward projection, superimposition and split screens.

If the rebus films have received little attention in the secondary literature on Weimar cinema, this is surely due in part to the fragmentary record. Of the eight films screened between 1925 and 1927, only *Rebus-Film Nr. 1* is available for viewing today, and this only in a version reedited by Leni for US audiences in 1927.[9] Judging by the lack of available evidence, moreover, it would appear that this reedited version enjoyed little success in the USA. This can, of course, be attributed in part to problems of translation. With its interlocking grid and overlapping letters, the crossword puzzle form poses an obvious practical challenge to linguistic translation, and a comparison of the available US version with the censor cards for the original German series reveals the extent to which Leni had to reedit parts of the original film to create a puzzle that worked linguistically in English. But alongside these strictly linguistic issues of translation lay a broader cultural problem, as the original films included

7 'Kreuzwort-Rätsel im Film!', *Der Kinematograph*, no. 976 (1925), p. 35.

8 Ross's film was popular enough to merit an additional release in book form. See Colin Ross, *Mit dem Kurbelkasten um die Erde* (Berlin: Bild und Buch Verlag, 1926).

9 The reedited version can be seen on Kino Video's *Avant Garde* compilation cited above. A copy of *Rebus-Film Nr. 3* has also survived and can be seen at the Filmarchiv/Bundesarchiv in Berlin. However, it has not been released commercially.

many clues that revolved around the knowledge of things, places and personalities specific to Germany. That Leni assumed such clues would have little appeal for US audiences can be deduced from the fact that he specifically removed all German references from the English version of *Rebus-Film Nr. 1*, including not only 'Isar' (a German river) but even the last name of Emil Jannings (who in fact made his first Hollywood film in 1927), which he replaced, borrowing footage from a later film, with the more widely recognizable term 'jazzband'.[10]

Despite such translational difficulties, however, Leni, Brennert and Seeber's German rebus films should, I shall argue, be seen as an important part of another transnational media history: namely, the history of puzzles – and of thinking about the activity of puzzle-solving with regard to changing forms of subjectivity – in the modern period. Riding the wave of 'crossword mania' that swept the USA and Europe in the 1920s, the rebus films enlisted both the crossword form and that of traditional rebus picture puzzles. But they did so, as I shall show below, in order to adapt these forms to a new medium of *moving* images and a corresponding understanding of modernity and modern subjectivity. Specifically, these films harnessed the properties of time and movement inherent to the filmic medium in order to transform the print puzzle into a forum for testing new modes of distracted perception and divided attention particularly appropriate to the urban environment.

Before turning to that cultural argument, however, I shall begin by situating the rebus films in terms of media history, and more specifically by asking how these filmic puzzles positioned themselves *vis-à-vis* their older print counterparts. The very choice of the title *Rebus-Film* suggests that the filmmakers saw their experiments in filmic puzzles as part of a much older tradition, and one fundamentally concerned with the relation between word and image. Emerging in the Renaissance largely as a pendant to the new European fascination with ancient hieroglyphics, the term 'rebus', derived from the Latin term *res* (thing), refers to a kind of picture writing – and more specifically a genre of cryptic image riddle – in which readers deciphered encoded phrases using pictorial clues to guess (in most cases) individual phonemes and phonetic units. While early rebuses generally circulated among courtly audiences and were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for encrypting political messages, the practice of rebus solving had, by the late nineteenth century, become widespread and particularly popular among readers of magazines and newspapers such as *L'Illustration* in France, the *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung* in Germany and *Il Gondoliere* in Italy. Nonetheless, even in this popularized form, the puzzles retained an aura of hermeticism and could still attain mind-boggling levels of difficulty.[11]

Given the status of the rebus puzzle as a form of 'picture writing', it might hardly seem surprising that early filmmakers would be attracted to the genre. After all, among the many forms of 'remediation' that characterized film practice and film theory in the early decades, the topos

10 It would appear that this is the only footage Leni added to the US version of *Rebus-Film No. 1*. Otherwise, the majority of the changes consisted of subtractions: in addition to 'Jannings' and 'Isar', Leni also subtracted the clues for *Nashorn* (rhinoceros), bringing the total number of clues down from eight to six. Besides the addition of 'jazzband', all of the other clues – 'arena', 'ice', 'India', 'nine' and 'Paris' – are retained in the English translation, with their original visual clues using a new puzzle grid.

11 For a good overview of the history of rebus puzzles, see in particular Eva Maria Schenck, *Das Bilderrätsel* (New York, NY: Hildesheim, 1973).

12 See, in particular, Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1922) (New York, NY: Liveright, 1970), pp. 199–216. In a letter from 1915, Lindsay described the new medium as follows: '[Movies] are as revolutionary in our age as the invention of Hieroglyphics was to the cave-man. And they can be built up into a great pictorial art . . . We now have Hieroglyphics in motion – and they can be made as lovely as the Egyptian if we once understand what we are doing.' Marc Chénetier (ed.), *Letters of Vachel Lindsay* (New York, NY: Burt Franklin, 1979), pp. 120–1. For Béla Balázs, film's pictorial language promised to 'overcome the curse of Babel'. Béla Balász, *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 22. Similarly, Fritz Lang wrote in 1927: 'With the silent eloquence of its moving images, whose language is understood equally well in all latitudes, film can make an honest contribution to repairing the chaos which, since the Tower of Babel, has prevented peoples from seeing each other as they really are.' Fritz Lang, 'Ausblick auf Morgen. Zum Pariser Kongress', *Lichtbild-Bühne* vol. 19, no. 229 (1926), pp. 9–10.

of a return to hieroglyphs or picture writing represented one of the most prominent, often serving to articulate fantasies attached to the new medium: fantasies of a return to sensuous immediacy, the revival of ritual community life, or – particularly after World War I – the restoration of a universal (visual) language.[12] Yet the form of picture writing cultivated in rebus puzzles differed radically from the cinematic fantasies of visual legibility; for the pictures of the print rebus, far from embodying any sensuous immediacy, presented as much of a hindrance to comprehension as an aide. Indeed, the very trick of the rebus puzzle consists precisely in *overcoming* the evidentiary, iconic dimension of the image in favour of a search for a hidden, generally homophonic, link. Thus in one rebus published in 1878 in the American children's magazine *St Nicholas*, Walter Scott's famous dictum 'O, what a tangled web we weave, When first we practice to deceive!' from his epic poem *Marmion* is transformed into images of a hat, a spider's web, a chicken, a fur cape, blocks of ice and a sieve (figure 2). It is only by exchanging the iconic referents of these images for homophonic equivalents that puzzle solvers can transform what appears to be a motley collection of fragments into a continuous and coherent semantic and syntactical unit. In other words, whereas the dream of film as a new form of picture writing involved the desire to regain a sense of sensuous immediacy in reaction to the abstractions of a rationalist epoch, rebus puzzles reinforced abstract thought by asking readers to subordinate sensuous images to phonetics.

Far from visual immediacy, then, the rebus puzzle demanded a concentrated effort to *suppress* the surface images in favour of a hidden textual message underneath. If this cryptic quality made the rebus an attractive genre for courtly games or political activity, it also made it an ideal metaphor for modern sciences laying claim to a privileged interpretative expertise. In the introduction to *Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud thus famously took rebus solving as the very model of a hermeneutic procedure which sees beyond the disguises and deceptions of surface appearances to detect a latent text beneath. Like an expert rebus solver, the dream interpreter tames the motley images of the manifest dream content, transforming them back into a latent linear text:

> If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation, we should clearly be led into error. Suppose I have a picture-puzzle, a rebus, in front of me. It depicts a house with a boat on its roof, a single letter of the alphabet, the figure of a running man whose head has been conjured away, and so on. Now I might be misled into raising objections and declaring that the picture as a whole and its component parts are nonsensical. … But obviously we can only form a proper judgement of the rebus if we put aside criticisms such as these of the whole composition and its parts and if, instead, we try to replace each separate element by a syllable or word that can be represented by that element in some way or other. The words which are put together in this way are no

POETICAL REBUS.

THE answer is a couplet in Sir Walter Scott's poem "Marmion."

Fig. 2. Rebus puzzle from
***St Nicholas* magazine (1878).**

13 Sigmund Freud, 'The interpretation of dreams', in James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume IV (London: Hogarth, 1953), pp. 277–78.

14 See Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 273–4.

longer nonsensical but may form a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance.[13]

Focusing on the random assortment of images described by Freud, Friedrich Kittler would later see rebus picture writing – alongside the performance tests based around meaningless syllables popular in nineteenth-century physiology – as the embodiment of a new regime of media reception in a post-Romantic era preoccupied with the materiality of the signifier and its effects; but the passage from Freud also makes clear that the psychoanalytic imaginary was largely defined by the analyst's perceived ability to transform such excessive material back into signified sense ('symbolic value') and narrative coherence.[14] It was precisely these values, moreover, that were inculcated into a much wider public, and particularly children, by the increasing dissemination of rebus puzzles in popular illustrated journals and newspapers in the nineteenth century. Freud's contention that dream interpretation could produce 'a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance' reads like a description of the Walter Scott rebus for children cited above.

Certainly, this model of rebus solving as the containment or suppression of the image was not incompatible with the filmic medium. For example, G. W. Pabst's 1926 film *Geheimnisse einer Seele/Secrets of a Soul* – made in consultation with Freud's associates Hans Sachs and Karl Abraham and for which Seeber himself designed the expressionist dream sequences – performs a similar interpretative operation on the screen. Telling the story of a troubled protagonist cured by a psychoanalyst, the film stages the cure by literally replaying the protagonist's fragmentary dream images bit by bit as the psychoanalyst's words explain them in intertitles on the screen, thus replacing the dream's excessive pictorial content with coherent text. More generally, one could point to the genre of the detective film, in which the detective sees through visual disguises and masks to decipher the text of criminal intentions beneath.

Yet this was hardly the sort of pictorial writing that proponents of film as a 'universal language' had in mind. Examining Leni, Brennert and Seeber's film series, moreover, one is struck right away by the *lack* of such visual 'enigmas'. Asking for the most part easy questions, the films operated in a much more straightforward fashion, generally showing several images of the same referent and asking viewers to guess at a concept. In one sequence of clues for the word *Eis* (ice), for example, we see images of a frozen river, blocks of ice, drinks on ice and spinning ice cakes. In their very evidentiary quality, these visual clues offer a useful point of comparison with the image of ice blocks in the Walter Scott rebus puzzle cited above, where readers have to place 'ice' together with the letters 'pr' and an 'act' to form a semantically unrelated word (practice); in the rebus films, by contrast, Seeber showed viewers several images of the same referent, often showing them simultaneously on the screen by means of masking and superimposition (as in the image of ice cakes).

In his 1927 book *Der Trickfilm in seinen grundsätzlichen Möglichkeiten/The Trick Film in its Fundamental Possibilities*, Seeber refers to such simultaneous collage shots – first developed for his *Kipho* advertisement film of 1925 – as a mode of conceptual representation (*Begriffsdarstellung*) in which the viewer is asked to compare several related images to form a concept.[15] There, in a chapter entitled 'The trick film of tomorrow', he describes such conceptual representations specifically as a continuation of the formal experiments undertaken in such works as Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy's *Images mobiles* (*Ballét mécanique* [1924]) or René Clair and Francis Picabia's *Entr'acte* (1924), both of which had recently been screened in the famous matinee *Der absolute Film* organized by the Novembergruppe and the Kulturabteilung of Berlin's Ufa Studio in May 1925.[16] Seeber clearly saw both the *Kipho* film and the rebus films as efforts to adapt recent techniques of abstract and experimental filmmaking to more 'industrial' ends – a project we also find formulated in an advertisement for the rebus films printed in Hans Richter's avant-garde journal *G. Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung* in 1926. Printed adjacent to articles on films from

15 See Guido Seeber, *Der Trickfilm in seinen grundsätzlichen Möglichkeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1979), pp. 241, 244. On the techniques of masking and superimposition, see pp. 40–67.

16 Ibid., p. 241.

17 See *G. Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, nos V–VI (1926), p. 122 (my translation).

18 See Sergei Eisenstein, 'Der Kinematograph der Begriffe' (1930), in Christan Ferber (ed.), *Der Querschnitt: Das Magazin der aktuellen Ewigkeitswerte 1924–1933* (Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 1981), pp. 367–69.

19 Sergei Eisenstein, 'The cinematographic principle and the ideogram', in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. Jay Leda (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1977), p. 30.

20 For more on Kahn's illustrations and their importance in Weimar culture, see Cornelius Borck, 'Communicating the modern body: Fritz Kahn's popular images of human physiology as an industrialized world', *Canadian Journal of Communications*, no. 32 (2007), pp. 495–520.

21 On the prevalence of light organs, see Laurent Guido, *L'Age du rythme: Cinéma, musicalité et culture du corps dans les théories françaises des années 1910–1930* (Lausanne: Payot, 2007), pp. 148–51.

Der absolute Film screening, including *Ballet mécanique, Entr'acte* and Richter's own *Rhythmus 1925*, the advertisement displays a conceptual collage of hands followed by a caption reading: 'New expressive means in film adapted for the first time to industrial uses – the crossword puzzle film'.[17]

But if Seeber's 'conceptual' collages looked back, as he saw it, to the tradition of absolute film, they also recalled other experiments and ideas of the 1920s, most notably Sergei Eisenstein's model of 'intellectual montage', which would first be presented in German in an essay entitled 'The cinematography of concepts' ('Der Kinematograph der Begriffe') in 1930.[18] Like Eisenstein's intellectual montage, Seeber's visual concepts occupied a middle ground between sensuous image and abstract thought. There were, however, significant differences between the two. Where Eisenstein understood his model *dialectally* as a means of producing, through the clash of visual elements, a third element that was, in his words, 'graphically undepictable',[19] Seeber employed a logic of *similarity*, where the concept emerged from the images' shared evidentiary, iconic quality. This aesthetic difference also corresponds to different understandings of the social function of cinema: where Eisenstein saw cinema as an instrument in the transformation of consciousness and society through dialectical struggle, thus creating something new, Leni, Brennert and Seeber's rebus films are more concerned with *adapting* viewers to the conditions of urban society as they emerged in the 1920s.

But if Seeber's concepts demanded a different sort of cognition on the part of spectators than Eisenstein's intellectual montage, they also differed from the cryptic rebus puzzle, which as we have seen demanded a difficult translational operation involving the exchange of visual literacy for auditory associations. In contrast to such sensory acrobatics, Seeber's conceptual images elicited something much more akin to the process of visual cognition as described by the popular Weimar science writer Fritz Kahn in his famous handbook *Mensch als Industriepalast/ Man in Structure and Function*, published between 1922 and 1931. There, Kahn presents cognition through a mass-media allegory precisely as the effort to supply the correct word for forms perceived visually. In one illustration, we see a head perceiving a key (*Schlüssel*), which is then recorded on a film camera, sent through a developing station, and projected by a film projector onto the wall of the brain. Meanwhile, an organist watching the projection screen plays out the word 'S-C-H-L-Ü-S-S-E-L' on a kind of letter organ.[20] A similar illustration for the English edition shows the same process of identification of a car (A-U-T-O) (figure 3). If Kahn's letter organ is reminiscent of the many colour organs used for synaesthetic experiments in light and sound combinations in the 1920s, it also resonates, in the present context, with the mental operations elicited by the rebus films.[21] Like the organist, spectators of the 'interactive' rebus films were called on to identify the concepts shown on the screen and to provide the letters of their words. In

309. This is what occurs in our head when we see an auto and say " Auto."

this way, these films constructed not a latent text in opposition to the image, but rather a textual level *in parallel* with the image, a unity of sound, thought and vision largely prefiguring the dominant operations of sound film itself.[22]

Given the lack of difficulty in these filmic puzzles, one might wonder what questions the rebus film genre was responding to and what kinds of pleasures these films put into play for 1920s audiences. A hint as to the films' appeal, I think, can be found in another advertisement for the *Rebus-Film* series that appeared in the journal *Der Kinematograph* in late 1925, one that attaches the films not to the rebus tradition but rather to the much more recent phenomenon of crossword puzzles:

> According to American reports, a man was recently run over by a car in Boston because he was so absorbed in his newspaper crossword puzzle that he didn't notice the vehicle in time. While no one disputes the usefulness of crosswords, we should still do everything possible to

22 There were, of course, many theorists in the mid-1920s who sought to create a sound film in which the soundtrack would stand in tension or counterpoint to the image, including Walter Ruttmann (in *Melodie der Welt*) and, more famously, Eisenstein. Seeber, however, appears to have been much more interested in synchronization. Already in 1904, he had unveiled his so-called 'Seeberophon', an apparatus for synchronizing projected images and gramophone recordings.

23 'Das "unheilvolle" Kreuzwort-
Rätsel', *Der Kinematograph*, no.
976 (1925), p. 36.

24 'Film,' Benjamin famously wrote,
'corresponds to profound changes
in the apperceptive apparatus –
changes experienced on an
individual scale by the man in the
street in big-city traffic, on a
historical scale by every present-
day citizen'. Walter Benjamin,
Illuminations, ed. and trans.
Hannah Arendt (New York, NY:
Schocken, 1969), p. 250, fn. 19.

25 See Ben Singer, 'Modernity,
hyperstimulus, and the rise of
popular sensationalism', in Leo
Charney and Vanessa Schwartz
(eds), *Cinema and the Invention of
Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA:
University of California Press,
1995), pp. 72–99.

26 On the history of the automobile
and traffic in early German film, see
Dorit Müller, *Gefährliche Fahrten:
das Automobil in Literatur und Film
um 1900* (Würzburg: Königshausen
und Neumann, 2001).

27 Grune's critics were particularly
impressed by the film's (artificial)
urban street settings and reserved
special praise for a scene in which
the little girl Sascha is caught in the
middle of the traffic, the entire
sequence shot from below so as to
emphasize the menacing
countenance of the cars. 'Suddenly,
we saw a tiny helpless little girl on
the square – the three-year-old
Sascha – who had presumably let
go of the maid's hand and now
stood on the street pavement,
threatened by a thousand dangers:
automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles
and throngs of people'. Albert
Sander, 'Carl Grunes *Die Straße*',
Film-Kurier, no. 154, 15 August
1923, p. 3.

28 See Tom Gunning, 'From the
kaleidoscope to the X-ray: urban
spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and
Traffic in Souls (1913)', *Wide Angle*,
vol. 19, no. 4 (1997), pp. 25–61.

discourage such extreme behaviour. For this reason, one should welcome the new crossword puzzle films by Rebus-Film Inc., which will soon allow everyone to solve his crosswords in the space of the cinema.[23]

Here, the filmic puzzle is described as a solution to particular problems of urban traffic and urban perception, suggesting in the process that the rebus films were intended largely for urban audiences. By now, it is a commonplace to say that the early twentieth century's rise in motorized traffic was one of the central factors in the transformation of urban psychology and perception. To cite the most familiar example, Walter Benjamin understood city traffic as the very embodiment of modern shocks and a central motivation for the transition he sought to document so thoroughly from a contemplative psychology of absorption to a strategically distracted one, a psychic disposition attentive to the sudden dangers emanating from outside the immediate visual field.[24] As Ben Singer has shown, moreover, Benjamin's analyses were undergirded by an entire mythology of the traffic accident in the popular press, where inattentive or overly-absorbed spectators were constantly warned about the need to be vigilant on city streets.[25] In Germany the preoccupation with traffic and its dangers, though already present in prewar films such as Max Mack's *Zweimal gelebt/Second Life* (1911) or the Deutsche Bioscop production *Weihnachtsträume/Christmas Wishes* (1911), would become a central part of the Weimar filmic imaginary, which would associate them again and again with the *urban* street.[26] In Karl Grune's *Die Strasse/The Street* (1924), for example, the omnipresent flow of traffic, which almost kills a three-year-old girl in one scene and knocks down a blind man in another, comes to embody all of the criminal dangers threatening the unsuspecting protagonist as his attention is absorbed by the city's marvellous window displays.[27] The staging of the protagonist's first meeting with the prostitute who will eventually ensnare him in a murder plot is paradigmatic here; as the protagonist stands transfixed by the animated display of a travel agency window, the prostitute's reflection appears to emerge from the traffic headlights that can be seen traversing the protagonist's body in its reflection in the window.

In his own genealogy of modern spectatorship, Tom Gunning has argued that filmic spectacles forged various alliances between two nineteenth-century modes of spectatorship that had emerged to replace the *flâneur* in the wake of mass urbanization: the detective and the gawker (*badaud*). Whereas the detective sees beyond surface appearances to the hidden realities beneath, the gawker loses himself in the kaleidoscopic world of urban impressions created in particular by advertising, commodities and street displays.[28] While print rebus puzzles clearly offered the pleasures of detective work – here one might recall Edgar Allan Poe's passion for cryptography – this hardly seems like a plausible explanation for the rebus films, given their distinct lack of depth and their appeal to a one-to-one correspondence between images and their

29 On Poe and the cryptographic tradition, see Shawn James Rosenheim, *The Cryptographic Imagination: Secret Writing from Edgar Poe to the Internet* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Marcel Danesi, *The Puzzle Instinct: the Meaning of Puzzles in Human Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 59.

30 A good media history of the crossword puzzle has yet to be written. On the history of crosswords mostly in the USA, see Coral Amende and Frances Hansen, *Crossword Obsession: the History and Lore of the World's Most Popular Pastime* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2001); Danesi, *The Puzzle Instinct*, pp. 62–68.

31 'The crossword puzzle', *New York Times*, 22 December 1924, p. 16.

32 See Danesi, *The Puzzle Instinct*, p. 64.

33 See Christoph Drösser, 'Eine kurze Geschichte des Grübelns', *Folio: die Zeitschrift der Neuen Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 12 (2007) <http://www.nzzfolio.ch/www/d80bd71b-b264-4db4-afd0-277884b93470/showarticle/95e0d2de-08fe-4b79-afa0-d3e59683cca1.aspx> [accessed 29 May 2009].

34 On the history of the cinema reform, see Stefan Andriopoulos, *Possessed: Hypnotic Crimes, Corporate Fiction and the Invention of the cinema*, trans. Peter Jansen (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 91–128.

referents.[29] As a forum for visual attractions promising to show audiences everything, the rebus films had more in common with the tradition of the gawker. Yet, as films such as *Die Strasse* and the advertisement for the rebus films themselves suggest, they also came at a historical moment when gawking itself had come to be seen as a potentially dangerous mode of perception. If the advertisements for the crossword films evoked these new dangers, however, this also suggests a specific set of questions about the role of mass-media *puzzles* and games within this context of changing modes of perception. When Leni, Brennert and Seeber set out to make their filmic crosswords in 1925, the crossword puzzle genre was still relatively new (the first crossword having been printed by the *New York World* in 1913) and was the object of the kind of pathologizing warnings about new media familiar both then and now. Indeed, the story of the absorbed crossword puzzle solver in the advertisement cited above echoes numerous warnings about the effects of crossword puzzles in the early 1920s, from both the USA and Germany.[30] The editors of the *New York Times*, for example, famously warned in an editorial from 1924 – the same year in which Simon and Schuster published the first crossword puzzle book – of an epidemic of 'crossword madness', and described obsessive scenes of people stealing dictionaries from libraries and (in a foreshadowing of more recent concerns with portable technologies from walkmans to mobile phones) losing all awareness of public space as they became absorbed in their puzzles. 'All ages', the editorialists explained, 'both sexes, highbrows and lowbrows, at all times and in all places, even in restaurants and in subways, pore over the diagrams.'[31] A year later, such concerns would receive humorous treatment on Broadway in the hit musical *Puzzles of 1925*, which featured a 'Crossword Puzzler's Sanatorium' for obsessive puzzle solvers.[32]

It was thus with a particular reputation that the crossword puzzle form was first introduced into Germany by the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* in March 1925, just after the stabilization of the Reichsmark,[33] and it would quickly become one of the icons – next to jazz instruments, chorus lines and the Fordist factory – of the 'Americanist' culture during the later Weimar years (figure 4). Recalling the US debates about crosswords and urban modernity, the advertisement from the *Kinematograph* cited above presented the new filmic version of the crossword as something of a solution to the madness associated with print puzzles, the space of the cinema offering a safe haven in which to indulge the otherwise dangerous pleasures of obsessive absorption in visual and linguistic riddles. In this, the advertisement in fact takes up a common strategy for the defence of the filmic medium, one most familiar from German debates on the relation between cinema and crime. Whereas the so-called *Kinoreformer*, or cinema reformers, of the 1910s argued that cinema would exert a suggestive effect over naive viewers, inciting them to imitate the crimes shown on the screen, defenders of cinema presented it repeatedly as a kind of surrogate space for the release of fantasies, providing a less harmful outlet for primal drives.[34] Writing in 1922, the expressionist author Kurt Pinthus summarized these

Die amerikanische Tänzerin Viola Welles läßt sich ein Kreuzworträtsel auf den Rücken malen

Photo Bonney

arguments succinctly when he described such surrogate abreactions as one of cinema's primary 'ethical' functions:

> Many people believe that intense, adventurous and fantastic actions shown on film have a suggestive effect on spectators, inciting them to imitation. Many crimes have supposedly been inspired by examples shown on film. I hold just the opposite view; for many spectators, the sight of foreign environments and intense events works to abreact and thus eliminate the excess desire for experience and adventure so often at the root of crime.[35]

The defence of cinema as a surrogate space for dangerous obsessions was thus a well-established precedent by the time Leni, Brennert and Seeber made their crossword puzzle films in the mid 1920s.

But although such a defence might have made for good advertising, the relation between the rebus film and urban psychology was somewhat different. For rather than offering a haven from the dangerous world of urban traffic or indulging outmoded forms of perception, these films functioned precisely as a forum for testing new modes of perception and attention particularly appropriate to the urban environment. In this, they constructed an 'interactive' filmic puzzle not as a palliative to urban modernity, but rather as an urban aesthetic in the Benjaminian sense: a training ground for the modes of distracted and divided attention adapted to the conditions of the urban milieu.

That new milieu is everywhere on display in the surviving *Rebus-Film Nr. 1*, for example in visual clues for 'Paris', which show scenes of people weaving through traffic reminiscent of Grune's *Die Strasse* or Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt/Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927). Indeed, looking through the censor cards for all eight

35 Kurt Pinthus, 'Ethische Möglichkeiten im Film', in Hugo Zehder (ed.), *Der Film von Morgen* (Berlin: Rudolf Kaemmerer, 1923), p. 123. Pinthus's text had a forerunner, of sorts, in Walter Serner's famous essay from 1913, in which he explained that the cinema spectator found 'satisfaction for his rudimentary primal drives in an image'. Walter Serner, 'Kino und Schaulust', *Die Schaubühne*, vol. 9 (1913), pp. 807–11.

36 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 2*, Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

37 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 1*, Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

38 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 4*, Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

39 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 6*, Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

40 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 7*, Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

41 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 4*.

42 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 2*.

43 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 2*.

44 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 3*, Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

45 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 5*, Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

46 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 3*.

47 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 2*.

48 Censor Card, *Rebus-Film Nr. 5*.

49 See Anton Kaes, 'Leaving home: film, migration, and the urban experience,' *New German Critique*, no. 74 (1998), pp. 179–92.

50 These two examples are taken from Leni's reedited version of *Rebus-Film Nr. 1*, but a glance at the censor cards reveals that such comments formed a pattern throughout the series. This lack of difficulty was also noticed by reviewers. As one writer for the journal *Lichtbild-Bühne* described it, 'The concepts making up each puzzle grid are chosen to be as simple and obvious as possible so that spectators need not wrack their brains too much'. 'Beim Altmeister der "schwarzen Kunst"', reprinted in Hans-Michael Bock (ed.), *Paul Leni: Grafik, Theater, Film* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1986), p. 184.

rebus films, one can chart a distinct preoccupation – alongside a tendency towards exoticism and virtual travel – with the characteristic phenomena of 1920s urban modernity. In addition to cities such as 'Berlin',[36] 'Paris'[37] and 'Rom',[38] some of the most recurrent semantic categories in the series include modern forms of technology and transportation such as 'Maschine',[39] 'Motor',[40] 'Automobile'[41] and 'Zeppelin';[42] modern media such as 'Zeitung' (newspaper)[43] and 'Radio'[44]; and mass spectacles such as 'Variété' (variety show),[45] 'Girl' (chorus girl),[46] 'Jazzband'[47] and 'Reklame' (advertising).[48]

Anyone familiar with Weimar culture will identify these concepts as phenomena typically associated – like the crossword puzzle itself – with Americanism and the culture of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity) that emerged in the mid 1920s. For Leni, Brennert and Seeber's audiences, such terms and phenomena would have constituted a veritable catalogue of things one needed to know for life in the new Fordist era. In his own reading of Ruttmann's *Berlin*, Anton Kaes has argued that the city films which flourished in the 1920s had particular relevance for the masses of recently arrived Berlin immigrants – who made up the bulk of cinema audiences – as a kind of affective rehearsal for city life, a virtual training ground for coming to terms with the anonymity, speed and vertigo of urban experience.[49] Something similar, I think, could be said of the *Rebus-Film* series, which used the onscreen game format, and the affective experience of play, precisely in order to facilitate the assimilation of that new milieu.

Indeed, the films sought to train audiences for urban life not only through their content (the concepts to be guessed), but also through their formal strategies. As one can see from the surviving copy of *Rebus-Film Nr. 1*, the aesthetics of these films demanded a form of distracted attention diametrically opposed to the absorption of traditional rebus puzzles. First, whereas print rebuses called for extended concentration, the rebus film used the time-based quality of motion pictures to test the player's capacity for rapid reaction. As we have seen, unlike the classical rebus, which required readers to go beyond the evidentiary level, the rebus film assumed a one-to-one correspondence between images and their referents, which the audience had to identify quickly. At times, the narrator even comments on the lack of difficulty, asking the audience 'That was really easy, wasn't it?', or hurrying them along with questions such as 'Haven't you got it yet?'[50]

In their demand for rapid recognition, the fleeting images of *Rebus-Film Nr. 1* correspond less to the hermetic picture writing of traditional rebus puzzles than to the images and texts of tachistoscopes and other stimuli–response testing devices prevalent in professional training in the 1920s, in which psychotechnicians gauged subjects' aptitude for work in the urban environment by testing their capacity for rapid identification of fleeting words and image (figure 5). Train companies, for example, often employed tachistoscopes to flash fragments of city names in order to test potential train conductors or station employees for their ability to

erfaßten Zeichen auf getrennten Elektrozählern additiv, kann γ) auch Brems-
wege für Reaktionshandlungen bei Sonderzeichen (Bedienen einer Brems-
taste) erkennen lassen¹). (S. Fig. 34.)
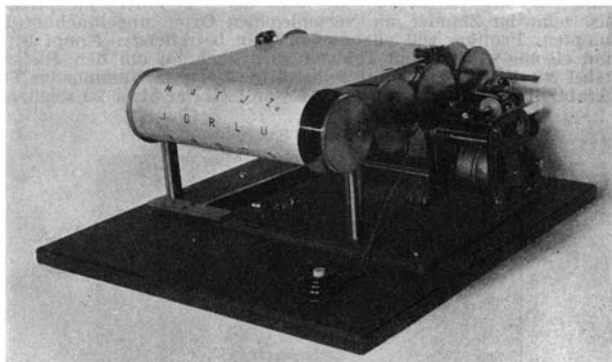
Fig. 34. Aufmerksamkeitsprüfer (geöffnet).
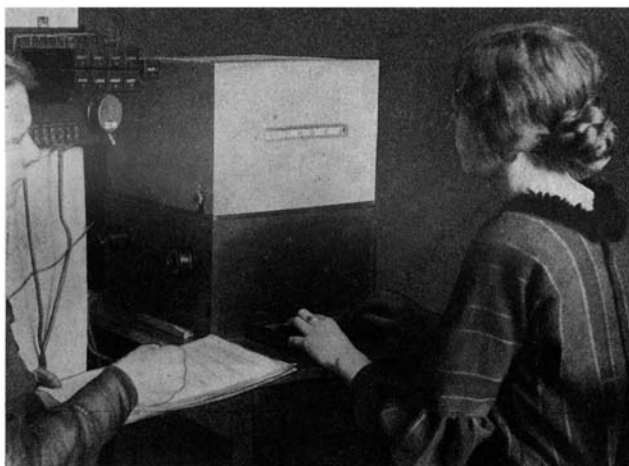
Fig. 35. Aufmerksamkeitsprüfer bei der Post.
Fig. 35 zeigt den Apparat im Dienste der Reichspost in einfacher

Fig. 5. Attention training devices from Fritz Giese, *Methoden der Wirtschaftspsychologie* (1927).

51 On this point, see Frederic Schwartz, 'The eye of the expert: Walter Benjamin and the avant-garde', *Art History*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2001), pp. 412–14.

52 Richard Hamann, *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst* (Cologne: Dumont-Schauberg, 1907), p. 204.

recognize destinations in the blink of an eye and make split-second decisions.[51] Such tests offer a crucial point of reference for any effort to understand what it meant to 'read the city' in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the forms of fleeting recognition they demand were precisely the forms of cognition deemed necessary for survival on the new motorized streets. As Richard Hamann describes it in a text from 1907:

> Crossing Potsdamerplatz or Friedrichstrasse on a busy day requires that presence of mind which makes do with only imprecise impressions and vaguely seen pictures to make adjustments. … The prerequisite to walking across a busy metropolitan street is the ability to make quick judgments on the basis of minimal signals.[52]

It is precisely this capacity of rapid recognition that was being 'tested' by the rebus films, in which players were asked not to decode carefully

53 Even the film's use of animation underscores this point. In the sequence illustrating the number nine we see a series of animated figures – candlesticks, cards, dice, and so on – shown in rapid motion representing that number.

encrypted messages or reconstruct poetic dictums, but rather to *identify* images – people, places and things – in a limited timespan.[53]

At the level of film aesthetics, this sense of speed is supported by the use of accelerated montage and destabilized perspectives to underscore the omnipresence of urban *movement.* Made just after the introduction of the 'unchained camera' in German films such as Murnau's *Der letzte Mann*/*The Last Laugh* from 1924, the rebus films revel in mobile perspectives, whether filmed from omnibuses, subway trains, the elevator of the Eiffel Tower, or simply from the point of view of a strapped-on camera performing pirouettes on the street. This infatuation with rapid movement is evident from the opening sequence of the first rebus film. Following images of flowing water shot from different angles, the film then shows us a series of mobile perspectives of Berlin: an angular swooping shot of the inside of a subway station; a fast-motion shot looking out from the rear of a moving train; a rapid upward tilt of the subway steps; several handheld shots of animals running on the city streets; a rapid swirling shot of a car; a swooping pan over the facade of the Ufa Palast am Zoo (Berlin's main film theatre); more swirling shots of coffee shops and display windows; and rapid pan shots sweeping past city buildings and monuments. Interspersed with introductory titles reading 'I am the first crossword puzzle filmed', these shots suggest that the real object of identification in *Rebus-Film Nr. 1* would consist less in any hermetic words or phrases than in the urban environment itself, an environment marked by rapid motion, fleeting glimpses and constantly shifting perspectives. In a manner reminiscent of the 'New Vision' of the constructivist movement or of Dziga Vertov's 'Kino-Eye' filming from atop the city's structures, the first-person narrator of Seeber's film shows us all sorts of views of Berlin from perspectives that seem to defy the capacities of a single human body. Indeed, the opening sequence declares its own debt to the filmic tradition of destabilized perspectives when, in the shot of the Ufa theatre, the camera glides past an advertisement for one of the most famous 'unchained camera' films of 1925: Ewald André Dupont's *Variété*/*Variety*, in which Karl Freund had taken the camera onto a circus trapeze in order to render the destabilized world from the dizzying perspective of Emil Jannings's overwhelmed acrobat. By including this shot of the *Variété* poster, as well as a clue for Jannings in the puzzle itself (in the original German version), Seeber associated his own camerawork for the *Rebus-Film* series with Freund's vertiginous unchained camera and its ability to implicate the body of the spectator in the filmic experience.[54]

Such dizzying shots reveal a lot, moreover, about the function of play in the rebus films. In his study *Les jeux et les hommes*/*Man, Play and Games* (1958), the anthropologist Roger Caillois famously divides human play into four structural categories with differing anthropological functions: competition (*agôn*), chance (*alea*), simulation (*mimicry*) and what he describes as vertigo (*ilinx*). Each category, Caillois adds, could tend more towards fantasy (which he terms *paideia)* or skill (*ludus*). Although one

54 For a contemporary discussion of the unchained camera as a means of heightening the bodily sensations of the spectator, see Lotar Holland, 'Subjektive Bewegung', *Filmtechnik*, no. 23 (1927), pp. 407–8.

would generally associate puzzle-solving with the *ludus* tradition – as Caillois himself does in his study – Leni, Brennert and Seeber's filmic puzzles, as we have seen, require little intellectual skill on the part of the audiences. But with their dizzying perspectives and montages, the films did tap heavily into the *ilinx* category. Significantly, this category was unique for Caillois in constituting the only type of play specific to the modern world in its reliance on the presence of rapid transport:

> In order to give this kind of sensation the intensity and brutality capable of shocking adults, powerful machines have had to be invented. Thus it is not surprising that the Industrial Revolution had to take place before vertigo could really become a kind of game. It is now provided for the avid masses by thousands of stimulating contraptions installed at fairs and amusement parks.[55]

If vertigo could become a game only with the industrial revolution, however, this is also because games of vertigo largely served to acclimatize people to the experiences brought about by the very industrial apparatuses that made such play possible. Indeed, this was precisely the function of amusement parks such as Coney Island or the Viennese Prater, which, as Rem Koolhaas and other recent critics remind us, largely served as gathering places for immigrants to assimilate the experience of cities like New York, Berlin and Vienna.[56] It should hardly be surprising if the amusement park appears in so many archetypal city films from 1920s cinema, from the fairground of Jean Epstein's *Coeur fidèle* (1923) to the vision of the hapless husband in Grune's *Die Strasse* to the rollercoaster sequence in Ruttmann's *Berlin*; in each instance, the vertiginous sensations of the fairground rides offer a metaphor for the delirium of urban existence, embodying, moreover, the 'mobilized virtual gaze' of cinema itself, which similarly serves to mediate urban experience for new city-dwellers.[57] While employing the crossword form, the rebus film explicitly incorporates such vertiginous elements into the experience of play, thus transforming games of intellectual skill into games of identification amidst the bewildering conditions of urban experience.

Finally, along with the cultivation of speed and movement, the rebus film also speaks to an environment characterized by the need to divide attention among simultaneous perceptions. Indeed, Seeber's use of simultaneous visual fields serves not only to illustrate concepts but to visualize the perceptual conditions of mass modernity, an aesthetic quality visible right from the opening sequence of the surviving film. Just after the appearance of the intertitle 'crossword' we see an animated collage of crossword puzzles followed by a collage of hands engaged in various leisure activities such as smoking, puzzle solving and card playing. Inserting the act of crossword puzzle solving into a whole array of mass leisure activities, this image is the first in a series of filmic collages that serve to portray individual objects or people – and particularly the film's spectators themselves – as part of a coexistent mass. Just after the collage of leisure activities, the animated Mr Rebus tells the audience to 'grasp

55 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 125–26.

56 See Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 1994), pp. 31–32. Recently, scholars have made a similar argument about the famous Prater amusement park in Vienna. See Siegfried Mattl and Werner Schwarz, 'Delirious Wien? Die Wiener Prater und die Assimilierung der Moderne', in Christian Dewald and Werner Schwarz (eds), *Prater Kino Welt: Der Wiener Prater und die Geschichte des Kinos* (Vienna: Filmarchiv Austria, 2005), pp. 87–101.

57 On the 'mobilized virtual gaze', see Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

58 See Seeber, *Der Trickfilm*, pp. 240–51. The rebus films were largely understood as a continuation of the technique developed for the *Kipho* film. See 'Beim Altmeister der "schwarzen Kunst",' p. 184.

59 Ibid., p. 251

60 Ibid., p, 248.

that little card' and a pencil, and the film accordingly shows us a collage of hands all searching for the crossword puzzle and writing implement (the same image reproduced in the advertisement in Richter's journal *G*). But if such concurrent images serve to insert spectators into the masses, they also expand the limit of spectators' visual attention. In *Der Trickfilm*, Seeber describes his use of the split-screen technique in his *Kipho* film of 1925 – in which he created collages of up to five simultaneous fields showing images of the film industry that alternate in a counterpoint-like rhythm – as an appeal to rapid identification.[58] Combining the effects of collage and montage, such animated counterpoint functioned, Seeber argues, to 'incite viewers in an entertaining way to identify rapidly the objects on the screen'.[59] Indeed, in language reminiscent of attention tests in psychophysics, he states at one point: 'One soon reaches the shortest period of visibility during which the eye can still identify and comprehend the objects shown'.[60]

Like a tachistoscope with multiple windows, Seeber's animated collages sought to push the faculties of perception to their limit, dividing attention between multiple phenomena and testing players' capacity for rapid recognition. No wonder, then, that Seeber's critics would see his rhythmical collages as an ideal device for filming urban life. As one writer put it in an article for the *Berliner Tageblatt* on the *Kipho* film, 'I believe that the simultaneous film image [developed by Seeber] is exceptionally well suited to representing the big city [*Großstadt*]'.[61] In making such a statement, the writer could have drawn on a number of avant-garde movements, from futurism to dadaist collage, which placed simultaneous perception and divided attention at the centre of urban aesthetics.

61 'Der absolute Film', *Berliner Tageblatt*, vol. 24 (September 1925), reprinted in *Das wandernde Bild: der Filmpionier Guido Seeber*, ed. Stiftung deutsche Kinemathek (Berlin: Elefanten Press Verlag, 1979), p. 95.

Taking up this modernist preoccupation with simultaneity, the rebus films also inscribe the demand for divided attention into their game format, not only through the collages on the screen but also through the medial division of screen and puzzle card. Unlike print rebuses and crosswords, the filmic puzzles demanded a form of spectatorial attention to be operating in two places at once. In order to solve the puzzle, the spectator's gaze was required to travel continuously from the screen to the card (where viewers wrote their response) and back again without missing an essential clue, and thus to perform both actions in a state of continuous distraction. Thus the rebus films demanded a form of distracted reception not unlike the one described by Benjamin in the case of architecture: a reception characterized by a simultaneous optical and tactile appropriation of its object through a play of glances and bodily movement.[62]

62 On architecture and distraction, see Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 241.

According to Seeber's own account in *Der Trickfilm*, his technique of the 'simultaneous image' used in the *Kipho* film and the *Rebus-Film* series was in fact a development of his famous *Doppelgänger* sequences from *Der Student von Prag* (1913), in which Paul Wegener appears simultaneously on different halves of the screen in the roles of Balduin and his malevolent double.[63] But what began as a device for representing a crisis in bourgeois individuality had become, by the 1920s, a means of playfully reproducing the conditions of urban vision and testing players'

63 See Seeber, *Der Trickfilm*, pp. 54–55.

64 The reference comes in Seeber's discussion of the *Kipho* film, which he describes as a 'Querschnitt durch den Film'. Ibid., p. 246.

65 On the history of the journal *Der Querschnitt*, see Kai Sicks, '"Der Querschnitt" oder: Die Kunst des Sporttreibens', in Michael Cowan and Kai Sicks (eds), *Leibhaftige Moderne. Körper in Kunst und Massenmedien 1918 bis 1933* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2005), pp. 30–48.

66 Danesi, *The Puzzle Instinct*, p. 62.

capacity for 'reading' the urban environment. Seeber himself suggests the relevance of his animated collages to urban aesthetics when he refers to them as a means of providing a *Querschnitt* or 'cross-section' through a particular phenomenon.[64] A key term of 1920s aesthetics, the 'cross-section' designated precisely the effect of simultaneity attained not only in the famous cross-section montage films such as Ruttmann's *Berlin* and sections of the collective film *Menschen am Sonntag* (while not literally dividing the screen, such films did use parallel editing to show audiences numerous phenomena occurring *simultaneously* at the diegetic level), but also in the photo-layouts of illustrated journals such as the aptly titled *Der Querschnitt*, which had become Weimar's best-selling periodical by 1925.[65] Like the illustrations of *Der Querschnitt*, the rebus film sought to show audiences the random and simultaneous crossings of the various people, things, places and attractions that made up the modern world.

It was, paradoxically, precisely this project that made the textual crossword puzzle – unlike its picture-puzzle predecessor, the rebus – an appropriate model for cross-section aesthetics. In his book *The Puzzle Instinct*, puzzle historian Marcel Danesi has argued that puzzles form a universal part of human culture, responding to an inherent need to make sense of things. But Danesi notes that the crossword represents the only puzzle form 'that does not have ancient origins. It is a 20th-century invention, devised not for some mystical or occult reason but for the sole purpose of providing intellectual entertainment.'[66] Taking Danesi's observation a step further, we might say that, like the *ilinx* category of vertiginous play examined by Caillois, the crossword form responded not only to a consumerist desire for entertainment, but also to a specifically modern need: the need to assimilate an increasingly fragmented and changing urban spectacle. Unlike the rebus puzzle, which demanded that readers restore linear coherence to what appeared on the surface as a motley collection of fragments, the crossword puzzle in fact assumed its fragmentary status, revelling in the chance encounters and crossings of heterogeneous phenomena on the puzzle grid. While early crossword puzzles attempted to be achieve a more systematic appearance – Arthur Wynne's first printed puzzle from 1913 appeared as a diamond with symmetrical numbering ordered from left to right and down the page (figure 6) – subsequent crossword layouts assumed an increasing emphasis on chance crossings. Indeed, there is nothing systematic about the grid used for the *Rebus-Film* series, in which words of different lengths criss-cross one another in a haphazard fashion, dictated by the luck of shared letters. While print crosswords might have lacked images, such layouts themselves offered a visual model for a cross-section aesthetic that attempted to juxtapose the simultaneous sites and attractions of the modern world.

Thus if the rebus films trained audiences in the art of visual reading, such literacy involved not so much the ability to restore a hidden linearity (the operation at the heart of rebus solving) as learning to enjoy exactly the kinds of heterogeneous and ephemeral constellations familiar from the crossword puzzle. This form of literacy is suggested by another

FUN'S Word-Cross Puzzle.

FILL in the small squares with words which agree with the following definitions:

2-3. What bargain hunters enjoy.
4-5. A written acknowledgement.
6-7. Such and nothing more.
10-11. A bird.
14-15. Opposed to less.
18-19. What this puzzle is.
22-23. An animal of prey.
26-27. The close of a day.
28-29. To elude.
30-31. The plural of is.
8-9. To cultivate.
12-13. A bar of wood or iron.
16-17. What artists learn to do.
20-21. Fastened.
24-25. Found on the seashore.

10-18. The fibre of the gomuti palm.
6-22. What we all should be.
4-26. A day dream.
2-11. A talon.
19-28. A pigeon.
F-7. Part of your head.
23-30. A river in Russia.
1-32. To govern.
33-34. An aromatic plant.
N-8. A fist.
24-31. To agree with.
3-12. Part of a ship.
20-29. One.
5-27. Exchanging.
9-25. Sunk in mud.
13-21. A boy.

Fig. 6. The first crossword puzzle in *New York World* (1913).

advertisement for the films in the journal *Lichtbild-Bühne*, in which the letters of the crossword puzzle are now replaced by images that surround the gaze of a smiling puzzle solver and (presumably) transform with each movement of the sprocket holes on either side (figure 7). As Peter Fritzsche has shown, such a 'reading' operation also found a model in
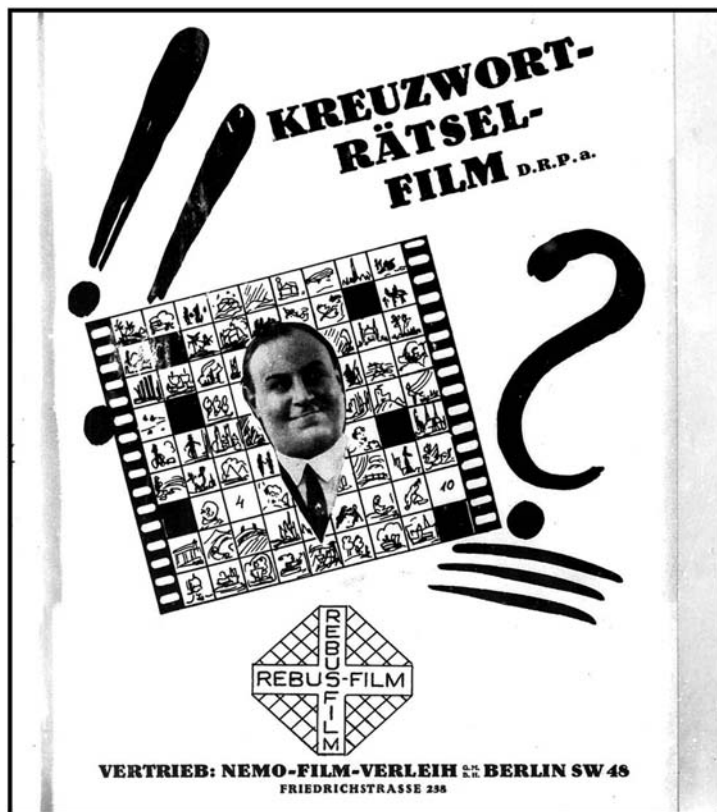
67 Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 180.

early twentieth-century print media, and particularly the daily newspapers that flooded Berlin in that period, to offer a constantly changing 'mosaic of unrelated events' from around the world.[67] Newspapers themselves, of course, served as a forum for daily crosswords, and the appeal of both media lay in their ability to generate constantly new and seemingly endless combinations of criss-crossing words and themes – a quality imitated in the serial character of the German rebus films. Certainly, these films were not the only ones to transpose the heterogeneous experience of newspaper reading to the filmic medium; indeed, in addition to the presence of the virtual lecturer, the emphasis on ephemeral constellations of disparate phenomena is one of the principal aesthetic devices that the rebus films borrowed from early attractions cinema, where projections consisted of heterogeneous combinations – often changing daily – of actualities, trick sequences and lectures. In Weimar, such a non-linear juxtaposition of disparate phenomena informed not only the cross-section film, but also experimental films such as Hans Richter's *Zweigroschenzauber/Two Pence Magic* (1929), an advertisement for the *Kölner Illustrierte Zeitung* which, through a montage of serial match dissolves, brings the most disparate phenomena into formal juxtaposition:
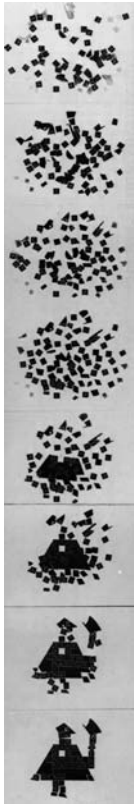
the moon seen through a telescope and a bald head, a high-diver and an airplane, a kiss and a handshake before a boxing match. Like the newspaper and the the crossword puzzle, Richter's film thus highlights the aleatory formal connections between phenomena (in this case their graphic similarity rather than shared letters) in order to underscore all the more forcefully the utter heterogeneity of the items brought into such ephemeral and fortuitous contiguity. It was precisely such chance constellations and crossings that Franz Hessel had in mind when, in a much-cited passage from his *feuilleton* text *Ein Flaneur in Berlin* (1929), he proposed a model of urban literacy far removed from the penetrating gaze of the detective:

> Strolling [*Flanieren*] is a way of reading the street whereby faces, displays, show windows, cafe terraces, cars, tram tracks and trees all turn into an entire series of equivalent letters, which together form words, sentences and pages of an always changing book.[68]

As a series of constantly changing and ephemeral combinations of letters, Hessel's 'sentences' are a far cry from the 'poetical phrases' admired by the solvers of rebus puzzles or interpreters of Freudian dreams, resembling much more the letters and images of a dadaist collage. This same aleatory, combinatory quality is emphasized at the end of the solutions section of *Rebus Film Nr. 1* when we see Mr Rebus, now solved, explode into a cloud of letters which will recondense into another chance constellation in the next filmic puzzle (figure 8). Like Hessel's ever-transforming collage of letters, or Baudelaire's famous 'kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness', the crossword film thus serves to generate ever new and ephemeral constellations of visual attractions, the 'reading' of which lies not in decrypting a secret code, but rather in the rapid identification of simultaneous phenomena in movement.[69]

In adding an iconic dimension to the print crossword, then, the 'rebus films' of the 1920s did not, in fact, effect a return to the nineteenth-century tradition of the rebus picture puzzle, but rather adapted the assemblage aesthetics of the crossword puzzle itself to the medium of moving images. In the process, their films used the film theatre not as a safe haven for dangerous forms of absorptive perception, but rather as a training ground for precisely the kinds of perceptual faculties required for life in an urban environment characterized by simultaneous impressions, rapid alternations and destabilized perspectives. In this, the rebus film's picture puzzles diverged sharply from the picture writing of its nineteenth-century predecessor. Whereas print rebuses challenged readers to transform a collection of apparently unrelated images into a semantically cohesive, linear unit, the rebus films revelled in its heterogeneity. And whereas print rebuses subordinated images to discursive thought, the rebus films trained spectators in a particular art of seeing. Above all, where print rebuses demanded a concentration of attention, the rebus films called for a rapid response and an ability to divide attention between simultaneous perceptions. But if these films rejected the mechanisms of

68 Franz Hessel, *Spazieren in Berlin. Sämtliche Werke III: Städte und Portraits* (Oldenburg: Igel, 1999), p. 103.

69 See Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques, L'Art romantique et autres Oeuvres critiques* (Paris: Garnier, 1962), pp. 463–64.

the rebus picture puzzle, they found a more appropriate model, paradoxically enough, in the verbal crossword. Precisely on account of its non-linear structure and its emphasis on aleatory combinations, the crossword puzzle offered an ideal metaphor for the kaleidoscopic perception of the modern city. Transforming that puzzle format into an 'interactive' film, Leni, Brennert and Seeber's films constructed a virtual testing ground for perception in this new kaleidoscopic world.

Disney's cows, the mouse, and the modernist moment

J. P. TELOTTE

1 Richard Schickel's biography has set the tone in this approach to Disney and humour. He suggests that 'a great deal of the humor in all the early Disney cartoons was of the barnyard variety', a type that he characterized as 'low' and 'cruel'. See his *The Disney Version: the Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1968), pp. 37–38. Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic: a History of American Animated Cartoons*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Plume, 1987), p. 37, strikes almost the same note, as Maltin describes how 'Mickey's early barnyard escapades were full of outhouse humor, and his treatment of fellow animals would never win applause from the Humane Society'.

Barnyard humour, a number of critics have suggested, was always one of Walt Disney's weaknesses, and its appearance in his cartoons, especially the early Mickey Mouse efforts, provides some of their more embarrassing moments, as in the case of Mickey playing a pig's teats like an instrument in *Steamboat Willie* (1928), a turkey's rear being shorn for its tail feathers in *Plane Crazy* (1929) or, in that same film, Mickey reaching for his plane but instead grabbing the udders of a cow perched on it and receiving a dousing of milk.[1] Quite naturally, commentators have linked the frequent appearance of such scenes to Disney's early farm life in Marceline, Missouri, a time enshrined not only in many of the Mickey Mouse cartoons but also in the turn-of-the-century Main Street that serves as a central portal and signature feature of the various Disney theme parks. But perhaps more than anything else, those crude, earthy images, best exemplified by the embarrassingly naked udders of Disney's cows, serve as a signpost for the very different nature of his studio's cartoons. For they signaled early on that the main province of his films would not be the amazing transformative world – and characters – that were a mainstay of film animation when Mickey made his debut. Rather, they repeatedly present us with gags built around the very unavoidability of the natural world and the inevitable links between nature and culture at a time when we were, through a variety of technologies and techniques, struggling to separate those realms, and to declare ourselves thoroughly modern.

To shed some light on Disney's seeming fascination with the barnyard at this modernist moment, I want to recall another, perhaps unlikely, film from this period, but one that has been singled out for its own – and,

2   This comment is cited in Herman G. Weinberg, *Josef von Sternberg: a Critical Study* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1967), p. 51, as well as in John Baxter, *The Cinema of Josef von Sternberg* (New York, NY: Barnes, 1971), p. 66. In both cases the implication is clearly negative, at least partly a measure of Mann's displeasure with his own limited involvement in the film, as well as its shift in focus from the Professor of his novel's title to the Dietrich character, Lola-Lola.

3   Peter Baxter, 'On the naked thighs of Miss Dietrich', *Wide Angle*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1978), p. 20.

I would argue, rather similar – fetishizing impulse: Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930). As he anticipated the adaptation of his novel *Professor Unrat* to film, Heinrich Mann supposedly remarked that its success would have to depend 'on the naked thighs of Miss Dietrich': that is, on the sheer sexual attraction of the film's relatively unknown star.[2] It was clearly a disparaging comment, suggesting the supposedly low aim of the film, von Sternberg's fetishizing treatment of his new-found star, and even what Mann perceived to be the cinema's generally lowbrow appeal, at least in comparison to the established art of his own medium of the novel. In a later, Freudian, reading of *The Blue Angel*, Peter Baxter would recall this comment in order to suggest both the rather superficial lure of the earthy image that Mann had evoked and the deeper power of certain constantly circulating cultural images, or, more precisely, both 'a manifest level of meaning and … a latent level' that is often repressed or bound up in the fetishized image, but that reflects the complex cultural context in which Lola-Lola and her Professor encounter each other.[3] So while admitting the lure of Marlene Dietrich's physical attributes, Baxter also prodded his readers to consider those other factors that inevitably constellated around – or beneath – her image and that infused the film: von Sternberg's own vision of primal desire and its troubled liberation in the modern world; the cultural circumstance from which Dietrich's carefully calculated image was drawn; even the very nature of the fetish in film and in modern society.

I want to draw on this reading to suggest that we might glimpse a similarly complex impulse operating in many of the early Mickey Mouse films – one that works its way out in those earthy, barnyard images that so often recur there. While no mouse cartoon provides us with the sort of textual richness to be found in von Sternberg's cinema, particularly in his ability to turn sexual images inside out the better to reveal their workings – putting Dietrich into a white tuxedo in *Blonde Venus* (1932), or evocatively pairing the amoral modern figure of Dietrich with the old-world (literally old-school) Professor – we can easily find analogues to his practice in the mouse films. As an example, we might consider a cartoon made in the same year as *The Blue Angel*: *The Shindig* (1930). Its opening sequence offers an extended introduction to one of those seemingly ubiquitous cows from early Disney cartoons, in this case the expressly named Clarabelle Cow lying on a bed of hay in a barn-like structure. But in that rustic setting we find her implicitly 'naked' and reading the scandalous Elinor Glyn novel *Three Weeks* (1907). When her country suitor Horace Horsecollar rings her doorbell/cowbell, Clarabelle looks embarrassed, quickly hides the book within her bedding and then dashes behind a partition to don a covering for her udders before admitting him. While the cow rushing to cover her udders is in part just another of those barnyard gags, this scene clearly operates on a more sophisticated level as well. For its visual fascination with the cow's naked udders is here enmeshed with a parody of modern sexual attitudes, of the sexual aura that Glyn had famously termed 'It' and that had already produced

Hollywood's 'It girl', Clara Bow – in this case comically figured as Clara*belle*. The scene thus suggests a point of transition, an interest in or openness to modern sexuality that is still bound up with an older attitude and a tendency to keep that sexuality repressed or hidden, as most cartoons tried to do. Yet revealing the cow's secret indulgence in this way, even her own covertly modern spirit, offers its own sort of inversion, reflecting not only the conflicted cultural mores of the era but also the way in which the film industry often works out its own fetishizing of sexuality as a game of coverage and exposure. It is in part that 'game', or at least the unexamined impulses behind it in Disney's early films, that we might explore by looking more carefully at the sort of barnyard humour that many would see as one of those films' hallmarks.

As further context for such an exploration, we might also briefly consider the character of popular animation practice prior to and during the first years of Mickey's appearance. As Tom Gunning has argued, much of the appeal of all early cinema resides in an appreciation for both its atmosphere and artifice, 'the thrill of transformation', the aura of change, all presented 'as a contrived illusion under the control of the projectionist showman'.[4] And that appreciation, the period audience's 'undisguised awareness of (and delight in) film's illusionistic capabilities', implicitly represented an 'encounter with modernity'[5] – thanks to the emphasis on successive attractions, fragmented experiences and the aesthetic of astonishment that these machine-driven illusions afforded. These same characteristics, as Esther Leslie emphasizes, were also bound up in both the practice and appeal of early animation. She describes how animation from the 1900s to the 1920s very much echoed early cinema's own break with tradition and resulted in what she terms a 'modernist curiosity' about cartoons, the actions of which seemed to be 'set inside a universe of transformation, overturning and provisionality', a realm of change that explicitly challenged a bourgeois realism and was seen as reflecting the modernist spirit.[6]

That sort of 'permutable world',[7] as Leslie describes it, is one that we can readily recognize in many cartoons of the period, but especially in the era's most noteworthy figure and the one against which other animation and animated figures were often judged: the Otto Messmer/Pat Sullivan creation Felix the Cat. As Michael Barrier suggests, 'there is abundant evidence … that critics and audiences recognized the [Felix] cartoons' superiority to most of what had gone before',[8] and the appearance of various imitators, including Walt Disney's own Julius, the cat of his Alice comedies, only underscores that popularity. At the core of Felix's success was his signature ability to change the rules of reality according to the needs of his character or the narrative. In fact, through his ability to treat everything onscreen as if it were plastic, he repeatedly asserted the modern attitude that the *only* reliable rule was that of change. But in addition to Felix, we should recall the similarly plastic possibilities explored by the Fleischer brothers' KoKo the Clown, who would take form directly 'Out of the Inkwell' of Max Fleischer and who could, in the course of his

4 Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism*, 6th ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 876.

5 Ibid.

6 Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2002), p. vi.

7 Ibid., p. 22.

8 Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 30.

9 Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, p. 23.

10 Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: the Animated Film, 1898–1928* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), p. 11.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., p. 12.

various adventures, easily take on other shapes, grow to gigantic proportions, and even assume hegemony over his creator. That transformative, even subversive power that motivated characters like Felix, Julius, KoKo and, to some extent, Disney's famous mouse served to inscribe animation's own 'ideographic playfulness'[9] into the early cinema's modernist character.

These effects, moreover, were all logically consistent with another characteristic of early animation, what Donald Crafton has described as its pervasive 'figural' emphasis: that is, the general 'tendency of the filmmaker to interject himself into his film'.[10] Recalling Gunning's image of the controlling 'projectionist showman', this reflexive element, as Crafton explains, not only took shape in the animated character as a kind of artist figure, or in the hand that we sometimes see 'drawing' a character who then comes to life, but often also surfaced 'cloaked in metaphors and symbolic imagery',[11] most obviously in such things as Fleischer's inkwell or Felix's tail with a mind of its own, which suggested the animator's function in these narratives of transformation. Moreover, all were part of another attraction of early animation, as it effectively invited our own 'vicarious participation in the ritual of incarnation',[12] in endowing something with life – literally animating it. Through those transformations, in the course of those constant changes, early animation seemed to stand outside of the common world with its natural laws and sense of substantiality, and to transport its audience beyond that world too. From that privileged spectatorial position viewers might relish the possibility of bringing dinosaurs back to life (as Winsor McCay does in his *Gertie the Dinosaur* [1914]), redrawing a possible mate to make her or him more beautiful (as Felix does in *Comicalities* [1928]), turning a goat into a Victrola (As Mickey effects in *Steamboat Willie*), or even, as Gunning suggests, seeming to participate in the (sometimes difficult) experience of modernity, at least by relishing the spirit of change that had been made centrally manifest in the films.

In trying to stake out a place in the highly competitive animation industry, Walt Disney had also worked extensively in this vein. As we have already noted, his cat Julius rather obviously recalled Felix and often resorted to a similar ideographic playfulness. His next major creation, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, also bore some physical and behavioural resemblance to this forebear, as is quickly apparent in his second film, *Trolley Troubles* (1927), when, very Felix-like, Oswald detaches his foot and rubs it on his backside for luck, or when in *The Ocean Hop* (1927) he turns his long ears into oars so that he can 'row' his airship through the sky. Yet the Oswald films also begin the sort of phenomenal shift that so marks the early Mickey Mouse efforts, as Disney and his animators seemed increasingly intent on exploring the physical world of their characters and, in the process, offer a rather more conflicted vision of that difficult modern emergence. A work like *The Mechanical Cow* (1927) points up this new direction, with its title figure that is at once a

marvellous testimony to the transformative, creative and even figural emphasis of Disney's cartoon contemporaries, as well as a sign of things to come. For this robotic bovine that Oswald, artist-like, doodles and endows with life (or animates) is something that, for all of its machine-age aura, he uses in a most mundane or conventional way, as a portable milk dispenser. So when he encounters a hungry hippo baby, Oswald attaches a hose to the cow's metal udders and offers it to the child (figure 1). That contraption thereby links the modern world with the barnyard, milks the machine-age idea for an earthy gag, and finds a transformative impulse even within the natural phenomenon, suggesting the possibility of a continuity or compromise between these quite different notions. And the mechanical cow is just one of a number of such strange hybrid figures that Russell Merritt and J. B. Kaufman have noticed in the Oswald canon, although they suggest that these characters were simply 'Disney's response to the increasingly surrealistic look of the Felix and Out-of-the-Inkwell cartoons'.[13] Certainly, such a compromise figure – part machine, part animal – is almost as strange, even 'surreal', as anything found in other cartoons of the era, but the key gag here, involving a baby, large metallic udders, and a hose to link the two, also smacks very much of the low barnyard flavour that would form one of those signatures of the Mickey Mouse cartoons between 1928 and 1932, as titles such as *Barn Dance* (1929), *The Barnyard Battle* (1929), *The Plow Boy* (1929), *The Barnyard Concert* (1930) and *Barnyard Broadcast* (1931), among many others, should only lead us to expect.

However, there are no metallic udders in the Mickey films, even if one other mechanical creation, the boxing robot of *Mickey's Mechanical Man* (1933), would surface later. Rather, the early cartoons are more down to earth, even tactile, with Mickey repeatedly – and roughly – turning

13 Russell Merritt and J. B. Kaufman, *Walt in Wonderland: the Silent Films of Walt Disney* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 26.
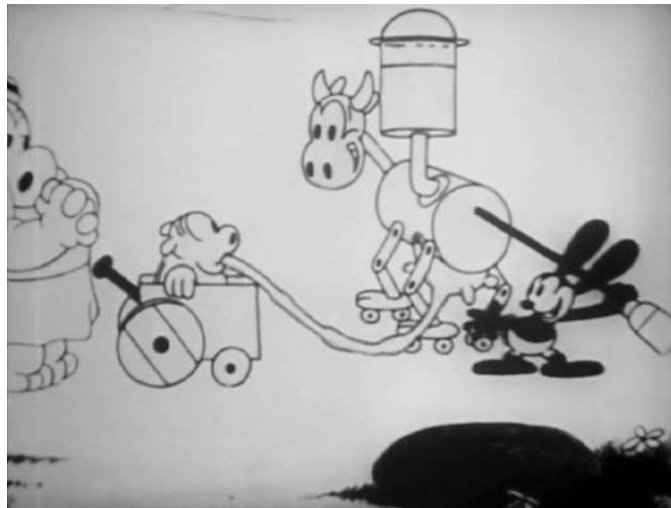
Fig. 1. Oswald the Lucky Rabbit's *The Mechanical Cow* **(1927). Copyright Walt Disney Studios.**

animals into tools or musical instruments: a cat with its whiskers stretched to its tail becomes a fiddle in *Jungle Rhythm* (1929), nursing piglets are 'played' by pulling their tails in *The Barnyard Concert*, geese become bagpipes in *The Musical Farmer* (1932), and, of course, goat, cow, sow and cat all serve similarly in the prototype narrative of such behaviour, *Steamboat Willie*. Karl Cohen observes that, 'since Disney came from a farm state, it isn't surprising that his cartoons were filled with barnyard images, including an outhouse or two'.[14] And indeed outhouses also figure prominently and variously in many of these films, collapsing unexpectedly to send their users scurrying, typically with the rear flaps of their underwear dangling open, in both *Plane Crazy* and *Mickey's Follies* (1929). With a nod to earlier films based on transformation and animate settings, an outhouse even comes alive to dodge bullets and bombs in *The Barnyard Battle*, and to jump aside as Mickey chases a piglet in *The Barnyard Concert*. Rear ends are constantly and embarrassingly being exposed, as turkeys and chickens have their nether feathers plucked, Mickey has to drop his pants to be inspected by an army doctor in *The Barnyard Battle* and, in a variety of instances, perhaps most notably *Plane Crazy*, Minnie Mouse loses her bloomers. Reacting to this body of images, Cohen simply concludes that 'Disney loved female animals having trouble with their underpants'.[15] But all of these examples, and numerous others that could be cited, suggest something more than the filmmaker's 'love' for low images. They do represent a rather unsophisticated level of humour for which these cartoons have at times been criticized, yet they also suggest an inescapably earthy, real-world context that is both different from that which contemporaries like Felix or Krazy Kat inhabited, yet also part of that world and the world of film audiences of the period.

It is with the cows, though, that we might begin better to see and expand upon this basic differentiation in cartoon styles, and perhaps to problematize the notion that Disney's taste simply ran to what Richard Schickel terms 'the blunt humor of the farm'.[16] For cows and their prominently displayed udders show up everywhere in the early mouse cartoons, and Mickey, lauded by various critics as the epitome of modernism for his energy and embrace of the technological, constantly runs foul of them. I earlier noted how he is doused by milk when he accidentally grabs a cow's udders in *Plane Crazy*, and what is essentially the same gag recurs in *Steamboat Willie* when Mickey tries to hoist a cow onto the steamboat and, in the process, grasps her udders and is showered (figures 2 and 3). When he makes overtures to Minnie in *The Plow Boy*, Mickey is directed to milk her cow instead, and in doing so he provokes an unmistakably romantic – and, on his part, clearly unwelcome – response from the cow, who turns and licks him, then smiles and looks at him with heavy-lidded 'cow eyes'. Even though he rebuffs this cross-species come-on, as if it might endanger his own anthropomorphic elevation beyond the barnyard, the cow then repeats the romantic look and even adds an appreciative lick. When Mickey finally and violently rejects the cow's
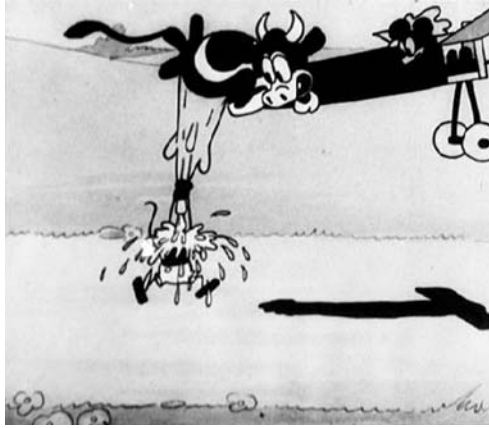
14 Karl F. Cohen. *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997), p. 10.

15 Ibid.

16 Schickel, *The Disney Version*, p. 38.
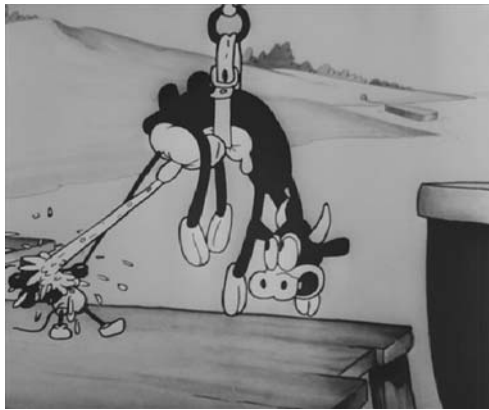
'come hithers' and tries instead to steal a kiss from Minnie, she, in a variation on the udder gag, douses him with a bucket of milk, flips her chin in the air, and walks off, and the cow, in turn, copies the gesture, flipping its udders at him and walking away as well. It is clearly a complicated and, in spite of its earthy matter, almost sophisticated gag sequence, showing Mickey being 'milked' for labour and attention, and in what is surely, even in this strangely anthropomorphic world, an unusual outcome, being rejected by both mouse and cow and eventually consigned to the old-fashioned task of ploughing the field, just as he was when the film began.

The gag is very much on the mouse in these early films, and seems almost unavoidable; as if, for all of Mickey's manifest modern attitudes, there were no way around these barnyard encounters and their embarrassing results. In the first Mickey cartoon, *Plane Crazy*, Mickey loses control of his new airplane and runs directly into the back end and flopping udders of a cow that is unable to get out of his way. That effect prefigures a number of other collisions and near misses in the film, as

Mickey proves not quite ready to become the barnyard Lindbergh he imagines himself at the narrative's start, when we see him looking at a picture of that modernist hero while smiling and tousling his fur in imitation (figure 4). This pattern of unavoidable collisions recurs in *Mickey's Choo-Choo* (1929), when engineer Mickey's train encounters a cow on the tracks and a point-of-view shot follows the cow as she runs into the background, her dangling udders towards the camera, until the train finally collides with her (figures 5 and 6). In *The Barnyard Concert* a series of circular chases around a barnyard produces a similarly inevitable result, as a cow that lifts its udders and allows Mickey to go through its legs one time fails to see him on the next pass and a rear-end collision results. And again, in *Traffic Troubles* (1931), Mickey's taxi goes out of control, smashes into a cow that cannot get out of the way and continues into the background, a strange amalgam of cab and cow, with its number plate now dangling from the cow's udders. Obviously such collisions constitute a kind of common and comic barnyard violence, but the strange pattern of the unavoidable cow, particularly when confronted with planes, trains and automobiles, all piloted or driven by a Lindbergh-like protagonist, is undeniably noteworthy.

In fact we can find some imaginative variations on this inevitable cow encounter woven into the narrative structure of many other early Mickey Mouse cartoons. *The Karnival Kid* (1929), for instance, opens on another of those nearly surreal images, for the first shot is of a cow's rear end, inexplicably suspended from a bunch of balloons – an image that we then follow as the cow floats deeper into the frame, introducing us to a riotous fairground at which Mickey works. There the suspended cow, seemingly drunk, plays a trick on a passing peanut vendor; he responds by bursting her balloons, and she, literally brought to earth, suddenly turns to the camera that has been following and blows a grotesque party tickler towards the audience with her tongue, as if reflexively noting that we had been closely following behind throughout the scene. The second sequence of *The Barn Dance* begins similarly, for the opening shot, a closeup, is of

Fig. 4. Mickey styles himself as Lindbergh, the archetypal modernist hero, in *Plane Crazy* (1928). Copyright Walt Disney Studios.
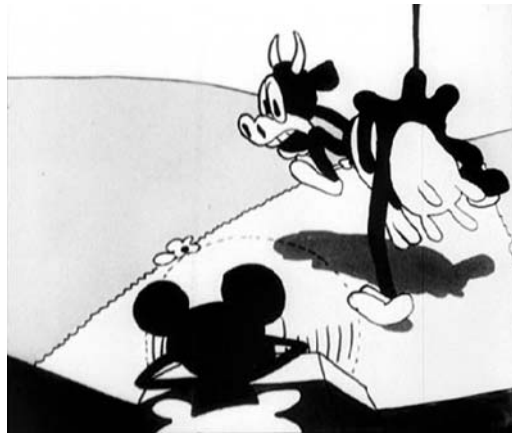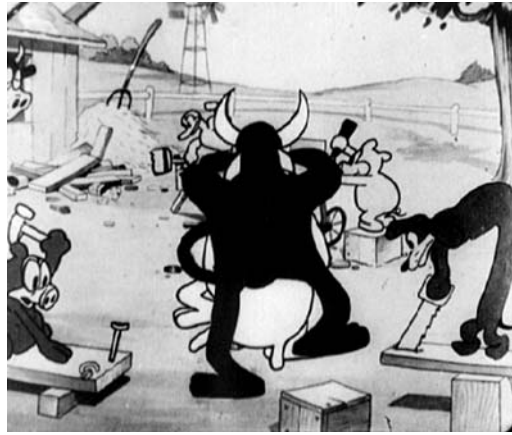
Figs 5 and 6. Following a cow that cannot – or will not – get out of the way, in *Mickey's Choo-Choo* (1929) and *Plane Crazy* (1928). Copyright Walt Disney Studios.

the rear end of a dancing cow, udders swaying to the rhythms of a country band. Occupying the entire frame, that strange image again leads the camera into the scene where we are introduced to Mickey and Minnie dancing. There Mickey becomes caught up in the spirit of the dance and its modern rhythms, but he proves awkward, repeatedly stepping on Minnie's feet, and is eventually rejected and left crying. Hardly modernist icons, these visually unavoidable cows establish the conflicted climate surrounding the action in these films, a climate in which even the ebullient Mickey can be brought down to earth.

In recalling the encounters in these and various other mouse cartoons in the same vein, I want to underscore not just Disney's inevitable repetition of certain gags or situations – indeed, all of the major cartoon studios recycled such gags – but to emphasize how these gags or situations are most frequently used. For those barnyard elements, particularly Disney's cows, seem to act as the lead into or the culmination of, even the dominant element in, entire scenes, in the process suggesting a similarly important

effect on Mickey himself. It is as if the mouse were constantly engaged in a struggle to become or act modern – after the fashion of Lindbergh, Douglas Fairbanks (*Gallopin' Gaucho* [1929]), or Buster Keaton (*Steamboat Willie*) – or simply to become something other than another of those barnyard creatures. And if we recall the implications of that notion of 'figuration' I described earlier, the mouse's struggles assume an added resonance. For with Mickey as a figuration of his creator, these films seem to point to a level on which Disney – as someone whose childhood was split between the farm and urban life – similarly struggled to find a modern identity for his films, and perhaps for himself. At times, as we have observed, the outhouses, bared bottoms and cows' udders would prove an irresistible, all-too-easy source of humour, certainly distinguishing these films from the more modern sensibilities that were frequently on display in the films of Felix the Cat, KoKo the Clown, early Betty Boop or Krazy Kat. And it is in these films, perhaps unsurprisingly, that we often see Mickey himself in tears, crashed, jilted or, in *The Plow Boy*, sent back to the plough; surely an evocative ending, given this perspective, but probably a more accurate imaging of the very difficulty of that transition to the modern, and suggesting a Mickey – as well as a Disney – who at times seems trapped in that crude, barnyard world.

Of course, there are also times when Mickey does manage to avoid the dousing with milk and soar like Lindbergh to adopt a truly modern persona, as in his Douglas Fairbanks imitation in *Gallopin' Gaucho*. However, the cows – as well as the barnyard world and humour they connote – do not quite disappear. Rather, they slowly become conventionalized, as in the gradually developing persona of Clarabelle the Cow, for example. They eventually become discreetly clothed, their udders carefully hidden beneath skirts, dresses and uniforms, even their narrative roles altered, as can easily be gauged by comparing the similar subjects of *The Barnyard Concert* from 1930 and *The Band Concert* from 1935. In the former, a cow flautist has her udders dangling into the foreground, forming an obstacle as Mickey tries to lead his rustic orchestra, while another cow's rear becomes an instrument for the drummer. In the latter, all the animal players are elaborately uniformed and seemingly disciplined musicians, and rather than leading into a scene or getting in the way, they are increasingly relegated to the background or peripheral spaces of the films. In *Mickey's Review* (1932), for example, we not only find a clothed Clarabelle, but a duet of gracefully dancing cows doing a balletic routine that looks towards the unlikely dancing hippos of *Fantasia* (1940). That shifting treatment – decentring the cows, as it were – thus implicates some stylistic changes that we find in the mouse films and elsewhere in the Disney canon.[17]

One explanation for this change might be found in the issue of censorship. As Cohen reminds us, in the early 1930s Disney ran foul of at least one state censorship board over his unclothed animals, and censors in Canada had also 'objected to a nude cow' in one of his films.[18] Certainly the motion picture Production Code tended to find all barnyard humour

17 For a discussion of the visual style of the early Mickey Mouse cartoons, particularly their emphasis on depth and spatial arrangement, see J. P. Telotte, 'The stereoscopic Mickey: space, animation, and the mouse', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2008), pp. 133–40.

18 Cohen, *Forbidden Animation*, p. 24. Cohen notes that the state of Ohio 'banned a Disney short showing cow udders', but does not indicate which cartoon had caused offence. (p. 24).

rather offensive and an easy target for its proscriptions, but the Code only gained real power in 1934, and the Mickey Mouse cartoons had long since – certainly by the end of 1932 – either eliminated or toned down those troublesome elements; the struggle, at least for propriety, had already been played out. However, Norman Klein argues that 'the bawdiness was not censored away simply because Walt became more conservative. The problems were more practical than that.'[19] They were more in keeping, as I have suggested, with that troubled modernist spirit and with Disney's contradictory attitudes towards the past, in which he had been nourished but still fetishized, and a present that offered him a host of possibilities, perhaps even a secure place in that unmistakably modernist form, the motion picture.

Of course, it might well be sufficient simply to observe that such barnyard humour, along with those naked udders that, given their recurrence, must have so delighted Mr Disney, was just meant to amuse audiences, particularly those drawn to the early cinema of attractions. Much of that comedy echoes a long tradition of folk art and tall stories which frequently includes more vulgar humorous elements; as Klein notes, the 'thumpings, the ass jokes, the flesh gags' were traditional and had quickly been absorbed into 'standardized formulas' for gags in early animation.[20] And those gags also reflected tendencies commonly found in early live-action comedy, a form that freely worked animal humour into its narratives. Finally, we might acknowledge that those recurrent images offer a further gloss on Disney's biography, particularly the influence of those few years on the farm that he claims to have cherished and that biographer Neal Gabler suggests he remembered 'more vividly than anything else in his childhood, perhaps more vividly than any place in his entire lifetime'.[21]

Yet as the prurient cow of *The Shindig* might imply, there also seems something allusive and contradictory in those earthy images, a problem in the 'desire' attached to them that has something of the cultural resonance that Peter Baxter discerned in von Sternberg's display of Dietrich. As I have noted, those 'funny' cows with their dangling udders are a constant source of trouble to Disney's mouse and figural representative: dousing Mickey, flipping and flaunting their not-quite-sexual organs at him, constantly getting in the way or putting him in his place. If they insert a sexual element into these cartoons, they insert it *repressed*, never quite making room for the onset of that modern moment that Mickey seems to herald, and that he tries so hard to grasp. In fact, we should again note just how often Mickey ends up punished (*Steamboat Willie*), put in his place (*The Plow Boy*) or even left in tears (*The Barnyard Concert*) in these early films. Such consequences suggest that it might not be enough to label these elements as common barnyard humour, just as it would hardly suffice to ascribe Dietrich's evocative power – or von Sternberg's clever use of it – to her 'naked thighs'. Rather, there is an element of cultural recalcitrance or recoil at work in the bared behinds, outhouses and,

19 Norman Klein, *Seven Minutes: the Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 52.

20 Ibid., p. 43.

21 Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: the Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2006), p. 10.

especially, the 'naked' cows, a recalcitrance that speaks of the cultural moment but that especially resonates for Disney's mouse films.

In fact, what we do see in these recurring earthy gags is more than a hint of the dynamic tension that informs Disney's early films. Born at the start of a new century (in 1901), Walt Disney was inevitably linked to both an older world and a modern one, to a rural, agrarian America and to an urban, technological one, to Marceline but also Chicago, Kansas City and, most emphatically, to Hollywood. And we can see the struggle to address that tension being worked through in those early Mickey Mouse films, as he capitalizes on those earthy images and the barnyard humour that could so readily be drawn from them, while also frequently situating that imagery within his narratives as a problem or barrier for his upstart modernist mouse, for his efforts at modern music or dance, and for his machine-age technologies. That humour thus serves as a reminder of the inherent contradictions into which these early and tremendously successful Disney efforts were born, perhaps even a sign that this sense of conflict, of being pulled towards rather different worlds, might have been one of the reasons for their success, a chord struck with an audience struggling to determine its own relationship to the modern.

But in the course of a few years, particularly in that period from 1928 to 1932, Disney would come to recognize that while such images struck a nerve with audiences, he would not have to depend solely, or even heavily, on them – certainly no more than von Sternberg would have to rely on Dietrich's 'naked thighs' – but neither would his films have to invest fully in and imitate the ideographic and reflexive character of other era cartoons. He had already tried to differentiate his cartoons from these others and to emphasize an imagery that could effectively evoke the experience of modern life – planes, trains, automobiles, and especially shows of all sorts (concerts, 'follies', revues, circuses) all of which we have noted in the various films described above. And giving Mickey a voice with *Steamboat Willie* rather definitively identified this figure as part of the modern world in a way that no other cartoon character – and only a few live actors – at the time could claim. In fact, remarking on the combination of the mouse's energetic persona with the new expressive possibilities of sound, a French critic of the period, Philippe Lamour, would proclaim that 'Mickey Mouse is a revolution in the matter of expression',[22] an assertion that would resound in Sergei Eisenstein's similar championing of Disney and especially his mouse, a figure in which he saw 'an upheaval, a unique protest against the metaphysical immobility of the once-and-forever given'.[23]

But the mouse's real modernist moment, I would argue, shows not simply in the technology he flies, drives or pilots, the shows he puts on, nor the sound he helps to pioneer for the film industry. Rather, it can be glimpsed precisely in those many embarrassing barnyard encounters: the dousings with milk from udders, the romantic overtures of cows, the collisions with cows that simply will not or cannot get out of the way. It is the nature of this struggle, the sense of being caught between two worlds,

22 Philippe Lamour, 'The new art: Mickey Mouse', *The New Hope: a Record of the Contemporary American Arts*, vol. 2, no. 5 (1934), p. 9.

23 Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda, trans. Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 33.

of being involved in two very different processes that becomes a key signature of the early Mickey Mouse cartoons. And the taming, clothing, even *naming* of these cows (as in the case of Clarabelle) would signal a change not just in the mouse but in the whole Disney world. In the early 1930s the Disney 'illusion of life' aesthetic was already taking shape at the studio,[24] and in 1932 Disney would adopt the new three-strip Technicolor process, accepting the Technicolor Corporation's injunction that colour be used naturalistically, as a component of 'enhanced realism'.[25] By 1937 Disney's inhouse engineers had produced a multiplane camera that would lend a more naturalistic, three-dimensional look to films like *The Old Mill* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Within that larger context of studio practice, Mickey himself would become more real – at least more realistically drawn – but more precisely domesticated, a human figure of 'control', as Klein styles him,[26] no longer really an animal but a decidedly middle-class mouse, the butt of bourgeois rather than barnyard gags.

Of course Bruno Latour has argued that 'we have never been modern',[27] that the modern moment was always marked by such slippages, repressions and contradictions. So we might hardly have expected Disney – or Mickey – to manage that feat, at least for very long. For being modern, Latour contends, involves the difficult negotiation of two very different processes: 'translation', the mixing of 'nature and culture'; and 'purification', distinguishing between 'distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other'.[28] And the typical modernist answer to this negotiation was to dismiss it by simply 'bracketing nature off' from 'culture'.[29] If the simple anthropomorphism of much early animation suggests an element of translation, the later mouse cartoons with their distinctly 'human' Mickey testify to the eventual victory – or imbalance – of purification. Yet, for a time, it seems that Disney could not quite buy into that bracketed modern world. His films could not get around, or away from, those cows whose naked udders mocked our culture's latest efforts at 'purification', at separating our cultured world from the nonhuman, natural one. It is in those early Mickey cartoons with their phenomenal insistence coupled to an almost equally insistent technology, in their sense of a new world emerging from but still bound to an old, that we can briefly glimpse something of Disney's own modernist struggle and perhaps better understand his mouse's appeal.

24 Two of Disney's most famous animators, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, provide a book-length treatment of this style's development in their *Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Disney Editions, 1995). It might well be argued that we could also approach this problematic modernity from the vantage point of animation style. Certainly a part of Disney's early appeal was in the way his cartoons engaged with the body *as a body* and not as another graphic mark, while also exploiting curvature and rubber hose forms to extend his cartoons' visual possibilities. That amalgam, however, would largely disappear at approximately the same time as Mickey became separated from the barnyard, that is, as Disney developed his 'illusion of life' style.

25 See Natalie Kalmus's explanation of Technicolor's colour policy in her 'Color consciousness', in Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (eds), *Color: the Film Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), p. 24. While the Mickey Mouse cartoons did not convert to colour until 1935 with *The Band Concert*, the general move towards a formally realistic style certainly seems reflected in the changing nature of the mouse narratives, including their retreat from those barnyard effects.

26 Klein, *Seven Minutes*, p. 44.

27 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 10.

28 Ibid., pp. 10–11.

29 Ibid., p. 104.

Melancholy Empress: queering empire in Ernst Marischka's *Sissi* films

HEIDI SCHLIPPHACKE

Within the landscape of West German and Austrian postwar cinema, Ernst Marischka's *Sissi* films of the 1950s – *Sissi* (1955), *Sissi: Die junge Kaiserin/Sissi: the Young Empress* (1956), and *Schicksalsjahre einer Kaiserin/The Fateful Years of an Empress* (1957) – have been simultaneously amongst the most popular with moviegoers and the least revered by film critics. These films, which offer melodramatic renderings of the courtship and marriage between the Princess Elisabeth of Bavaria (1837-98) and Franz Joseph (1830-1916), the Habsburg Emperor, have generally been dismissed by film critics, considered to be popular *Edelkitsch* (noble kitsch) and little more.[1] Beloved in Germany and Austria alike to this day, the Austrian/West German coproduction *Sissi* is screened biannually on German television, and ten million people in West Germany alone purchased tickets to see the film premiere in 1955.[2] The films have often been dismissed as aesthetically unimportant by critics of German and Austrian cinema, and if they receive any consideration from film scholars and cultural critics they are generally viewed as being symptomatic of the kind of regressive politics one associates with the *Heimat* (homeland) films of the 1950s, films that represent a pastoral Germanic homeland as an antidote to burdensome national histories. Shot in glossy Agfacolor, the *Sissi* films are usually read as representing a hybrid genre of *Heimatfilm*, historical drama, melodrama and even fairytale: the innocent princess marries the Emperor, and their union signifies a liaison between Germany and Austria that reimagines the unsuccessful 'marriage' between the two countries following Hitler's annexation of Austria.

While such readings of the *Sissi* trilogy bring to light some of the spectatorial desires in play on the part of diverse film audiences (1950s West German and Austrian audiences as well as Germans and Austrians in subsequent decades), this essay will propose a queer reading that suggests that the *Sissi* films offer a complex cinematic text that calls forth highly complicated modes of affect on the part of diverse film audiences. I begin with the simple fact of the iconicity of 'Sissi' and the *Sissi* films within contemporary German and Austrian queer cultures, and link this queer reception to the mode of representation and temporality of the films themselves. How do these films successfully cross temporal boundaries, achieving immense popularity not only with 1950s West German and Austrian audiences but also with contemporary German-speaking audiences? How do they travel so well across diverse cultural milieus, attaining cult status with mainstream German and Austrian audiences (and even with audiences across the West, with the notable exception of the USA) as well as with contemporary German and Austrian queer audiences? A queer reading of the narrative and stylistic strategies within the films themselves offers a window onto their surprising crosscultural appeal. I will argue here against the dominant interpretation that the films represent a postwar return to political and personal harmony; rather, the films reflect an anxiety about fixed locations and stable notions of home. The restless heroine of the films, Sissi herself, is constantly traveling, calling into question the presumed needs of the *Heimat* audience. Indeed, I contend that the films offer queer representations of time and space both formally and on the level of narrative. What Lee Edelman calls the 'reproductive futurity' of heteronormative temporalities is consistently denied in the films' narrative due to Sissi's repeated flights from the scene of the family.[3] Formally, the films offer modes of temporality that belie notions of linearity and progress. In particular, all three films end with long, elaborate scenes of spectacle, tableaux vivants of royal display that engage in a temporal stretching that interrupts the flow of narrative, suspending the story in a manner that privileges an atemporal allegorical pleasure over historical continuity. Rather than offering the simple pleasures of a fantasy of national harmony to traumatized West German and Austrian spectators, these films reflect deep-seated anxieties about home and historical continuity that haunt post-Nazi Germany and Austria.

Appearing in 1955, 1956 and 1957, the *Sissi* films were among the most popular films of the 1950s in both West Germany and Austria. The premiere of the first film in the trilogy, *Sissi*, corresponded with the signing of the Austrian *Staatsvertrag* (the first post-fascist Austrian consitution) and a period of relative stability and financial prosperity in Austria (due, in part, to the Marshall Plan and an expanded industrial base).[4] Austria had officially declared itself 'neutral' in 1955, although it retained certain sympathies with the highly contested region of South Tyrol as well as with Hungary, both locations that are represented in the *Sissi* films. Hungary is a central location in the second film of the trilogy, the release date of which coincides with the brutal Soviet intervention in

3 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 9.

4 See Barbara Jelavich, *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic: 1815–1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 296.

the Hungarian revolution. Thus, although Austria was officially neutral, Austrian sympathies, like those of Sissi herself, would likely have fallen on the side of the Hungarian revolutionaries. The *Sissi* films depict Sissi's passionate attachment to Hungary and her important role in the creation of a dual monarchy. Austrians likewise sympathized with German-speaking Tyroleans, and the lovers Sissi and Franz Josef enjoy their honeymoon in the Tyrolean mountains in the second film, *The Young Empress*. The emotions evoked in audiences at the time likely ran, therefore, counter to the official neutrality of Austria. Perhaps more importantly, Austrians' keen interest in South Tyrol potentially undermined their conscious post-Nazi rejection of any 'Germanic' community predicated upon language and culture. Although Austrians slipped relatively easily out of responsibility for Nazi war crimes, the legacy of the unholy alliance between Germany and Austria during World War II remained lodged in the cultural unconscious. (The first official 'apology' for Austrian complicity in Nazi war crimes was made by Chancellor Franz Vranitzky in 1991.)

Unlike Austria, West Germany was put under intense international pressure to admit to the crimes it had committed during the Nazi period. However, by the 1950s, also with the help of the Marshall Fund, West Germany was beginning to enjoy the economic prosperity that would come to be coined the 'economic miracle'. The year of *Sissi*'s release, 1955, marked not only the time of Austrian postwar independence but also the beginning of German rearmament. Despite the pain of defeat and humiliation after World War II, a renewed sense of national pride was emerging in West Germany. In 1954 the West German football team had defeated Hungary in the World Cup final, an event that is often linked to the reemergence of German nationalism. The *Sissi* films were thus being screened to two audience groups who were trying to reconstruct acceptable national narratives in the wake of partially repressed histories of atrocities committed and the humiliation of defeat.

The three films detail the young adult life of Elisabeth of Bavaria, beginning just before her marriage to the Emperor of the Habsburg dynasty, Franz Joseph, in 1854 at the age of seventeen. The second film of the trilogy, *Sissi: the Young Empress*, tells the story of Sissi's early years as an Empress and her difficulty in adjusting to the ceremonial restrictions of the court. The central conflict of the film is the power struggle between Sissi and her mother-in-law, Sophie, over Sissi's first child. When Sophie insists on taking charge of the child, Sissi rebels and returns to her parents at Possenhofen, though ultimately she cannot resist Franz Joseph and returns to Vienna, where she is able to forge a reconciliation between the Hungarian rebels and the Austrian state through her charm and empathy. Whereas the first film stages as its finale a royal wedding between Sissi and Franz Joseph, the second film ends with a journey through Hungary that culminates in a royal procession and the coronation of Sissi and Franz Joseph as monarchs of the Austro-Hungarian empire. In the final film of the trilogy, *Sissi: the Fateful Years of an Empress*, Sissi has given in to her

fascination with Hungary and spends a great deal of time with her admirer, the former rebel, Count Andrassy. Sissi flees Hungary when Andrassy confesses his love for her, only to discover that she is deathly ill with what is probably tuberculosis. The remainder of the film takes place in various European locations, such as Madeira and Corfu, as Sissi convalesces. Once she has recovered her health, she travels with Franz Joseph to Italy, where the royal couple is highly unpopular (unlike the *Sissi* films, which were hugely popular in Italy). *The Fateful Years of an Empress* ends with a lavish procession in Venice during which the Italian people greet the monarchs with hostility. It is only when the Italians view Sissi's reunion with her young daughter Marie in Venice that they warm to the royal couple. Thus, what are usually billed as kitsch *Heimat* films actually represent a heroine who, like the historical figure she represents, experiences multiple humiliations and displacements.

What I identify as a queer reading of *Sissi* brushes both with and against the grain, for 'Sissi' is today simultaneously a cherished German/Austrian heroine and a queer icon. Sissi performances are common at drag balls and queer celebrations such as Christopher Street Day. In this context, the historical myth of Sissi expands the film text: Elisabeth of Austria's murder by a young anarchist in Geneva in 1898, her obsession with beauty and hair, and her purported anorexia all contribute to the myth of the melancholy Empress. The contemporary queer reception of Sissi is certainly aided by this myth as well as by the tragic life of the actress Romy Schneider, the much loved star of the *Sissi* films. Schneider famously turned her back on her Sissi role later in her career, moving to France and making art films. Like Elisabeth of Austria, she suffered the death of her son at an early age and her own life ended tragically at forty-four in a possibly drug-induced suicide. Indeed, both Sissi and Schneider are often memorialized along with Lady Diana, another tragic royal figure who has attained cult status in queer communities. Schneider even played the role of Manuela von Meinhardis, the boarding-school girl in love with her female teacher, in the 1958 remake of *Mädchen in Uniform* (Géza von Radványi), and Schneider also revised the role of the Empress Elisabeth in Luchino Visconti's *Ludwig* (1972), a film that portrays the homoerotic fantasies of King Ludwig of Bavaria, Sissi's cousin. As in the case of *Mädchen in Uniform*, *Ludwig* retroactively links Schneider and Sissi to queer texts.[5] Indeed, the *Sissi* films perform a dual gesture of 'straight' affect and queer displacements of scenes of heterosexual harmony. They engage liberally in an aesthetics of performance, often juxtaposing the natural and the artificial – a mode of aesthetics associated with the tenets of camp. Yet at the same time the affective tenor of the films is serious: Sissi's joys and crises are the emotional centre of the films so that a straight reception, so to speak, is in keeping with the melodramatic arc of the films themselves. For all of the representational excess in the form of lavish royal processions and ceremonies, the films nevertheless provide a narrative with which diverse postwar audiences can identify. In this sense, I do not read the *Sissi* trilogy as a merely queer performance of excess.

5 See Claudia Breger, *Szenarien kopfloser Herrschaft – Performanzen gespenstischer Macht: Königsfiguren in der deutschsprachigen Literatur und Kultur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2004). Breger codes Ludwig as a new kind of 'queer' king (pp. 194–227). One could also retroactively read Karlheinz Böhm, the actor who portrays Franz Josef, as a queerable icon: he starred not only in the infamous film about a perverse

voyeur, *Peeping Tom* (Michael Power, 1960), but also in Rainer Fassbinder's *Faustrecht der Freiheit/Fox and His Friends* (1975), in which he plays a gay playboy.

6 Dana Luciano, 'Coming around again: the queer momentum of *Far From Heaven*', *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*, vol. 13, nos 2–3 (2007), p. 250.

7 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

8 Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia', in James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (London: Hogarth, 1957), p. 245.

9 Ibid., p. 253.

10 Klaus Mladek and George Edmondson, 'A politics of melancholy', in Carsten Strathausen (ed.), *A Leftist Ontology: Beyond Relativism and Identity Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 211.

Rather, I will suggest avenues into a queer reading that highlight the mood of melancholy and loss that characterizes these films. These avenues include the interruption of linearity and the curtailed reproduction of the heterosexual family, the aesthetics of performativity, queer readings of travel and nation, and the final tableaux vivants of royal display.

The word queer is a cognate of the German word *quer*, which points to the askance or skewed quality of a relationship. Hence, queerness is not simply oppositional but rather, as argued by Dana Luciano, obliquely related to 'normative modes of synching individual, familial, and historical time'.[6] Queerness effects, then, a displacement of sorts; and it is precisely the affect and aesthetics of displacement that are staged in the *Sissi* films. I suggest that the melancholia associated with the repeated suspension of harmony and resolution in the films can be linked simultaneously to a queer affective mode and to one that characterizes the former Nazi nations of Germany and Austria. Heather Love has pointed to the mood of melancholy in modernist texts concerned with queerness and to the particular pain associated with the impossible love of queer desire.[7] Indeed, one could argue for a metonymic relationship between queerness and melancholia. Queer love is, by definition, melancholy, for the relationship to the object is always shrouded in ambivalence in contemporary western cultures that do not recognize these relationships as equal. And melancholia, according to Freud, is a displaced form of mourning, a mourning that never ends because the melancholic is so far removed from the object of loss that he is not sure *what* has been lost: 'This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious'.[8] For Freud, melancholia is characterized by a loss that remains undefined, by ambivalent feelings towards the object of loss, and by the regression of the libido into the ego. It is a death drive, as the ambivalent feelings towards the object of loss remain repressed and are turned in upon the self. As in the case of mourning, melancholia is characterized by an inability to act or engage with the outside world, but, unlike in mourning, feelings of ambivalence towards the object of loss (which could be an abstract idea or projection) lead to self-punishment and the festering of a narcissistic wound. The melancholic tends to suicide, to sadism, to sleeplessness and to anorexia. The 'open wound'[9] can never be healed; it remains partially disavowed, unrecognized, and hence fosters repetition and displacements. If the structure of mourning is one of a slow, linear detachment from the object of loss, the structure of melancholia is rather one of repetition and suspension. As Klaus Mladek and George Edmondson put it: 'Something lacks, is insufficient, is not right, is out of joint. Melancholia suspends the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists.'[10] In the case of queer melancholia, repression leads to ambivalence and shame.

The former Nazi nations of Germany and Austria are subject to their own brand of melancholia. In 1967, Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich famously proposed an analysis of post-fascist German

11 Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern, Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, 1967).

12 Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 101.

13 Ibid., p. 35.

14 Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia', p. 251.

15 Caryl Flinn, *The New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 55.

culture in their treatise *The Inability to Mourn*.[11] Here, German culture was theorized as a space of losses that could never be mourned due to the guilt of the fathers of the nation. If the crimes of the fathers were unspeakable, then their deaths could not be mourned. Germany, then, was doomed to a state of melancholy, caught between denial and mourning. As Eric Santner has argued, it is through the father, Lacan's paternal signfier, that 'all mourning must pass'.[12] Yet Santner points out that this figure presents a barrier to mourning in postwar Germany and Austria, where the fathers themselves, and the nations for which they stand, are responsible for the traumas of the children, traumas which are 'transmitted to the second and third generations'.[13] Since mourning is blocked, melancholia becomes an affective and structural mode that is built into post-Nazi German and Austrian cultural products, one that speaks to the citizens of post-Nazi nations without ever clearly naming the object of loss. Rather, melancholia reproduces itself via repression and ambivalence indefinitely from generation to generation. Thus, although radically different in content, the melancholy of queer loss mirrors the post-fascist inability to mourn theorized by the Mitscherlichs. After all, queer loss has historically been neither named nor mourned. It is, according to Love, characterized by shame, an emotion that reflects the self-punishing structure of melancholia.

Herein lie some of the affective and aesthetic overlappings that render the *Sissi* films so important both for mainstream German and Austrian film audiences in the 1950s and beyond and for contemporary queer audiences. But melancholia should not only be understood as an illness. Even Freud admits that 'the self-tormenting in melancholia' is 'without doubt enjoyable'.[14] There is a pleasure in displacement, repetition and suspension. As Carol Flinn argues, the state of melancholy and not mourning is conducive to aesthetic work:

> It can be argued that hysterics, mourners, and melancholics are all people who remember too much. Specialists in the past, they are consummate historians. Yet only the mourner gets it right, by any conventional measure. For this reason, I believe that those who 'get it wrong' may have more to offer. For melancholia acknowledges the impossibility of overcoming the past – and even questions the desirability of doing so.[15]

In this sense, melancholia is an ethical stance, the refusal to heal wounds. It is potentially productive, even enjoyable. The affect of melancholia I ascribe to the *Sissi* films takes cognizance of such an understanding of melancholia; melancholia is *about* loss. The structure of melancholia enhances and suspends the feeling of loss and, in so doing, offers relief. Via the narrative of the 'melancholy Empress' and the formal structures of suspension, allegory and temporal stretching, the *Sissi* films stage melancholia, offering a queer mirror to radically diverse cultural groups. An initial route of access to queer readings of the *Sissi* trilogy is via its camp qualities of performativity and artificiality. In its hyperperformance

16 Luciano, 'Coming around again'.

of reality, camp always emphasizes a gap between signifier and signified, and is thus always also about loss. Yet it would be myopic to link queer aesthetics and spectatorship exclusively to notions of camp. As Luciano argues in her reading of Todd Haynes's homage to Douglas Sirk, *Far From Heaven* (2002), queer affect is produced through a combination of excess and straightness.[16] In this sense, it is important to open up the discussion beyond the discourse of 'camp' most famously begun by Susan Sontag in her 'Notes on camp' in 1966. Queer theorists are ambivalent about this text for although Sontag puts homosexuality and queerness on the aesthetic map, she also trivializes what she sees as a 'homosexual aesthetic'. While Sontag admits that 'not all homosexuals have Camp taste', she nevertheless asserts that homosexuals 'by and large, constitute the vanguard – and the most articulate audience – of Camp'.[17] Camp art is, for Sontag, 'decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content'.[18] Camp art depoliticizes, and hence it is often concerned with history, approaching the past sentimentally.[19] And while Sontag admits that a camp eye can 'transform experience', she nevertheless asserts that 'not everything can be seen as Camp. It's not *all* in the eye of the beholder.'[20] So while Sontag tends to ally a homosexual aesthetic with camp as hyperperformativity and artifice, the link between the campness of the artwork and the queerness of the beholder cannot be assumed, suggesting that texts might perform their queerness even without the help of the queer eye. It is statements such as this that make Sontag's text still relevant, for the question of the performance of the text is at the crux of contemporary discussions of queer textualities.

17 Susan Sontag, 'Notes on camp', in *Against Interpretation* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 290.
18 Ibid., p. 278.
19 As Heather Love has put it, with 'its refusal to get over childhood pleasures and traumas', camp 'is a backward art'. Love, *Feeling Backward*, p. 7.
20 Sontag, 'Notes on camp', p. 277.

Yet, as I have already suggested, hyperperformance and excess are only part of the picture, and this is where Sontag's treatise reaches its limits. She asserts that camp 'objects and persons' are predicated upon artifice: 'Nothing in nature can be campy'.[21] A queer aesthetic, however, often relies on the interplay between artifice and nature, ultimately complicating the distinction and highlighting the unbreachable abyss between the two. In this sense, a queer reading relies on the frame that circumscribes the 'natural'. Within the *Sissi* films the dichotomy between nature and artifice is consistently undermined. Ultimately, excess and straightness go hand in hand; Sissi's naturalness calls attention to its own frame. For post-1966 queer audiences this gap screams camp, while 1950s Austrian and West German audiences would be familiar with an aesthetics of excess via their own film histories. As Andrea Lang and Franz Marksteiner have shown, Austrian cinema in particular is characterized precisely by the opulence of images used (borrowed from films based on operettas and on the Habsburg court), a 'Catholic taste for self-indulgent imagery', by a fixation with the myth of the Habsburg dynasty and with 'emblematic natural environments'.[22] All of these elements, as Lang and Marksteiner point out, are present in spades in the *Sissi* films. As Robert von Dassanowsky shows, the *Sissi* films 'recalled the elegant orchestration of the Viennese film'.[23] Indeed, Thomas Elsaesser argues that the city of Vienna has been coded cinematically as 'transparent duplicity',[24] that is,

21 Ibid., p. 279.

22 Andrea Lang and Franz Marksteiner, 'Im Schatten seiner Majestät: Überlegungen zum österreichischen Nachkriegsfilm', *Blimp*, no. 32 (1995), p. 30.
23 Robert von Dassanowsky, *Austrian Cinema: a History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), p. 161.
24 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Make-believe Vienna and matter-of-fact Berlin: Walter Reisch and *Das Lied ist aus*', in John Warren and Ulrike Zitzlsperber (eds), *Vienna Meets Berlin: Cultural Interaction 1918–1933* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 222.

as a space that relishes the revelation of the gap between signifier and signified that is revealed in hyperperformance and excess. Here, then, is another moment of crosscultural (mainstream/queer) pleasure and recognition afforded by the *Sissi* films.

The first time the spectator sees Sissi she is spiritedly riding a horse, cheered on by her admiring father. She then begins to care for the animals (some birds and a fawn) that reside in various cages in front of the house. Here it becomes clear that Sissi's naturalness is constructed within a number of frames: the frames of the birdcage (figure 1) and the pen in which the fawn is kept, and even the perfectly tailored riding outfit Sissi wears during her 'wild' ride. Hence, while the film ostensibly contrasts the artificial and formal world of the Austrian court with Sissi's joyful and natural childhood in Possenhofen, this dichotomy is already complicated early in the first *Sissi* film. Not only are the animals domesticated and caged, but Sissi likewise takes great pleasure in the containment of nature. In the second film of the trilogy, *Sissi: the Young Empress*, Sissi's father, Duke Max of Bavaria, tells his wife that Sissi 'is sitting in a golden cage'. While this statement could be seen as a veiled critique of the formal court rules to which Sissi is forced to conform, it metonymically and symbolically links Sissi to the birdcage from the beginning of the original film, a cage to which – we learn in *Sissi: the Young Empress* – the birds have returned of their own accord after having been set free upon Sissi's departure. Thus nature exists only as a frame, as a citation of an imagined naturalness free from artifice.

The non-dialectical interplay between nature and artifice in the *Sissi* films complicates their categorization as traditional *Heimat* films. The first film of the trilogy retains elements of the *Heimatfilm* genre to which it is indebted, such as the idealization of a pastoral Germanic nature and an

Fig. 1. Sissi feeds the caged birds at Possenhofen in *Sissi*.

25 As Johannes von Moltke puts it, the *Heimat* genre both 'glorifies the past and celebrates modernity'. *No Place Like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 15.

26 Cited in ibid., p. 3.

27 Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: the German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

28 Von Moltke, *No Place Like Home*, p. 8.

29 Ibid., p. 22.

30 Ibid., p. 95.

ambivalent engagement with modernity.[25] It begins with an idyllic establishing shot of the lake at Sissi's childhood home, Possenhofen. The camera then pans to the left to reveal the mountains and the family house. We hear the music of yodelers, the sound of the Austrian and Bavarian mountain idylls of the classic *Heimatfilm*. Children enter the frame, playing and fishing in the lake. It is from the perspective of a yodeler on a raft that we are first introduced to the Duke, as the two greet one another. In this way, the opening sequence of *Sissi* offers a quintessential *Heimat* scene.

The *Heimatfilm* is, according to Elsaesser, 'Germany's only indigenous and historically most enduring genre'.[26] Celia Applegate traces the history of the *Heimat* genre to questions of national identity in the nineteenth century. Applegate argues that, within the German context, the drama of national identity is played out in the space of the local; the *Heimat* novel and film dramatize the interplay between these two modes of identity, local and national.[27] As Johannes von Moltke points out, *Heimat* is an overburdened term, signifying the loss of innocence, alienation, premodern ideals and a romantic notion of the simple country life.[28] Von Moltke suggests that West German cinema turned 'inward' in the 1950s as a response to the US occupation of both the nation and its cinema.[29] The tropes of the *Heimatfilm* are, then, utopian Alpine scenes, simple country folk in traditional dress, and the preservation of conservative morals. It is precisely the stability of the local and of nature that offers a defence against the infringement of the foreign. Von Moltke cites *Sissi* as a quintessential example of the *Heimat* mantra, as the heroine quotes the comforting words of her father: 'Should your life ever bring trouble or sorrow, then go through the woods with open eyes. In every tree and brush, in every flower and every animal you will observe the omnipotence of God, which will give you solace and strength.'[30] Here, *Sissi* reiterates the central *Heimat* tenet of the return to an innocent and unchanging nature.

The idyllic *Heimat* panorama and iterations, such as 'Papili''s nature mantra cited above, code the *Sissi* trilogy as *Heimat* films. Yet the *Heimat* cues are ultimately compromised in each instance. Indeed, even in the most classical example of *Heimat* within the trilogy, the opening sequence of the film, Sissi is introduced to the film audience through a highly theatrical mode of staging and framing. The heroine enters the idyllic *Heimat* scene on a 'wild' horse, and is already framed in multiple ways in this initial scene. Sissi's family has been eating, and her father and mother discuss Franz Joseph, the nephew of Sissi's mother, with an emissary who arrives to drink with Max. The two clink glasses to 'the future Empress of Austria', followed by a cut to Sissi, framed by the idyllic setting of the mountains and lake, squealing with delight as she jumps over a fence. At this moment, all activity at the family table stops and the parents jump to attention, asking, 'Wasn't that Sissi?'. This is the frame through which Sissi and the emerging star Romy Schneider are introduced to the spectators. Sissi's mother, played by Schneider's real-life mother Magda

Schneider, complains that Sissi is probably 'riding that wild horse again', and we are then treated to a long shot of Sissi riding towards the camera. Her parents run to the garden to watch their daughter together, framed by the house, greenery and roses. The ideal family of the *Heimat* world of Possenhofen is subject to theatrical framing from the outset, modeling the wonder of the spectator who witnesses the arrival of Sissi.

The introduction of Schneider is thus reminiscent of Vivien Leigh's carefully choreographed emergence as a star in *Gone With the Wind*, as described by Tom Brown.[31] Brown details the hotly anticipated moment of Leigh's appearance in the film, as her admirer, Brent Tarleton, moves to the side so that the spectator gains a first view of the star. Interestingly, Brown links this moment to the theatricality of the setting of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, in which the *Führer* is introduced in a plane through parting clouds.[32] In *Sissi*, the spectator is first shown Schneider's star performance via the parents, who watch from a kind of special box in the theatre. The connection to *Gone With the Wind* is warranted: Sissi/Schneider emerges as star text in a manner similar to Leigh, while both films are historical dramas that were immensely popular with the public yet generally panned by critics. Brown cites Thomas Schatz, who calls *Gone With the Wind* 'our proverbial 800-pound gorilla – an oversized nuisance that simply won't go away and an obvious menace to our carefully constructed habitat'.[33] Schatz's dramatic characterization of *Gone With the Wind* encapsulates the problems that *Sissi* created for Schneider in particular. Ernst Marischka wanted to make a fourth film, but Schneider was determined to escape from the 'golden cage' of her Sissi role. As Mary Wauchope points out, the general sentiment of the 1950s was that 'Romy didn't play Sissi – she was Sissi!'.[34] The containment of the 'nature child' Sissi is mirrored in the claustrophobic framing of Schneider.

Tropes of framing and entrapment delimit Sissi's movement throughout the trilogy. Having arrived in Vienna for the wedding, she reveals her feelings of entrapment as she runs through Schönbrunn looking out of each window for 'the animals'. Similarly, Sissi keeps a parrot in her own rooms at the court, and her father's comment about her living in a golden cage follows a scene in which Sissi has given Franz Joseph a present for their four-week anniversary – a painting divided into framed sections depicting various locations of interest in the Vienna area. Sissi is fascinated by this representation, in particular by the framing of nature in the form of little painted trees. Thus, although presumably concerned in large part with the goal of undermining the hyper-formal Spanish Court rules followed at Schönbrunn, Sissi's desires are nevertheless perfectly met by the little framed images of Vienna and its parks. Although the film invites us to contrast the free-spirited Sissi of the first film with the somewhat alienated and ill Sissi of the final film, the complex interplay between nature and artifice is already laid out early in the trilogy.

In the second and third *Sissi* films, the representations of landscapes and outdoor spaces appear ever more like stage settings. The stylized

31 Tom Brown, 'Spectacle/gender/history: the case of *Gone With the Wind*', *Screen*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 157–78.

32 Ibid., p. 170.

33 Ibid., p. 167.

34 Mary Wauchope, 'Sissi revisited', in Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger (ed.), *Literature, Film and the Culture Industry in Contemporary Austria* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 180.

images of the stations of Sissi's travels, such as Corfu and Madeira, recall the representational excess that characterizes the images of nature captured in Sissi's wedding gift. Sissi is sent to these exotic locations because of her illness, presumably tuberculosis, in *The Fateful Years of an Empress*, and these outdoor scenes are staged in a manner that belies any organic notion of nature. In Madeira, Sissi's sickbed has been placed on a romantic and exotic hill overlooking the sea. The Agfacolor print highlights the brilliant colours of the scenery, yet these images are jarring, as the sickbed seems to have been carried to the most popular tourist spot in Madeira (figure 2). Public and private, the exotic and the domestic coexist in hyperdramatic mode. Shots of the recovering Sissi with her mother, lady-in-waiting and escort (Oberst Böckl) in Corfu likewise appear completely artificial. The Austrian court is represented here in the warm Mediterranean light, standing amidst the columns of Greek ruins.

The scenes in Corfu and Madeira are reminiscent of the carefully choreographed melodramatic tableaux vivants of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which displayed the feminine in exotic locations in the salon cultures of the Germanic states. Within these tableaux vivants, the female figure stands allegorically for renunciation on an overcoded stage containing multiple classical symbols.[35] Peter McIsaac points to the 'juxtapositions of seemingly disparate cultural categories' in the famous performances of Henriette Hendel-Schütz during Goethe's time.[36] Audiences of the period also regarded 'tableaux as an art form that co-mingles public and private realms'.[37] Particularly in the sickbed scenes in Madeira, categories of private and public are no longer relevant and any semblance of realism is thrown to the wind. The scenes in Madeira and Corfu likewise highlight the hybrid nature of the *Sissi* films and the multiple modes of access the films offer to straight and queer spectators

35 See Peter M. McIsaac, 'Rethinking tableaux vivants and triviliality in the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Geothe, Johanna Schopenhauer and Fanny Lewald', *Monatshefte*, vol. 99, no. 2 (2007), pp. 152–76.

36 Ibid., p. 156.

37 Ibid., p. 157.

Fig. 2. Sissi's sickbed in Madeira in *The Fateful Years of an Empress*.

Fig. 3. 'The dress is much too big for your chicken breast. You should give it to me!' 'It doesn't suit you. You wear glasses. You will never look like Sissi!'. Picture courtesy Ralf König.

38 Lang and Marksteiner compare the tableaux in the *Sissi* films to those in the travel films of the Austrian director Franz Antel. Lang and Marksteiner, 'Im Schatten seiner Majestät', p. 30.

39 See Tim Bergfelder, *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s* (New York, NY and Oxford: Berghahn, 2005).

40 Most recently, the parodist Michael 'Bully' Herbig has created a popular animated parody of the *Sissi* films, *Lissi und der wilde Kaiser* (2007).

41 Ralf König, *Prall aus dem Leben* (Hamburg: Carlsen, 1989), pp. 39–41.

across the decades. The travel scenes in Corfu and Madeira resemble similar ones in the popular travel films (*Urlaubsfilme*) of the time[38] and in the exotic West German thrillers and adventure films that became popular in the 1960s.[39] The opening sequence, nature shots and family narrative reflect elements of the *Heimatfilm*. Yet the films likewise embody the spectacle of excess of the Habsburg court and the opera so that the contemporary spectator can respond to these images in a manner that is simultaneously camp (queer) and straight (local).

The complex nexus of nature/artifice that can be said to queer the Sissi films is recalled in one of the many citations of Sissi from queer and popular culture,[40] the story of the *Schwulendemo* (gay demonstration) from the German graphic novelist Ralph König's *Prall aus dem Leben*. In this narrative, four gay men pull up at an Autobahn rest stop on their way to a *Schwulendemo* (gay pride march) in Hamburg to change into drag.[41] The first issue at stake is who will wear the 'Sissi-dress', and a fight ensues amongst the four (figure 3). They then decide to park directly in front of the restaurant rather than hiding behind a truck in order to change into their drag outfits. Thus the comic-strip frames depict alternately, and sometimes in the same frame, the cross-dressing queers and the presumably 'natural' space of the restaurant. The Sissi-dress serves as an object of camp delight as well as one that inspires feelings of reverence. Whoever wears the dress is, by virtue of its citation of Sissi, metonymically coded as beautiful. As an artefact the dress connotes both premodern naturalness and the playful artifice of the crossdresser, recalling the complex play of nature and the frame in the *Sissi* films. In the end, one of the men accidentally locks the car keys in the boot and crisis ensues. The dialectic between the 'natural' world of the people in the restaurant (who stare unabashedly at the men in drag) and the

'performative' world of the queers is simultaneously heightened and undermined by the very real problem of getting access to the keys in the boot. The graphic novel genre highlights the artificial through its disinterest in realism and its complex methods of framing, which automatically denaturalize whatever is depicted in the frame.

König's text is a brilliant sendup of the complex dynamic between nature and artifice as well as of the multicoded nature of a Sissi-dress in contemporary German-language queer culture. Likewise, the notion of performativity, a staple element of definitions of queer identities, is framed multiple times since it is not only the group of queer men that hyperperforms femininity but also the text of the Sissi-dress itself which signifies a framed naturalness regardless of who wears it. Just as the Sissi-dress is a standard feature of German drag shows, so do drag performances abound within the *Sissi* trilogy, as Claudia Breger has pointed out.[42] Sissi herself plays the role of a common woman in her chance meeting with Franz Joseph while fishing at Bad Ischl. She has traveled to Bad Ischl with her mother and sister, Nene, since the latter is to be betrothed to the Emperor, unbeknownst to Sissi. Sissi 'escapes' from her rooms at the palace in order to go fishing, and it is at the lake that she meets and seduces Franz Joseph in her simple attire. There is no clear motive for her performance, as she would presumably be greeted warmly by the Emperor were she to reveal her true identity. But performance is simply second nature for Sissi. And this ultimately gratuitous game of deceit is repeated many times within the three *Sissi* films. In *The Young Empress*, Sissi and Franz Joseph both assume non-aristocratic identities while honeymooning in a mountain hut in South Tyrol, performing the role of commoners to the particular delight of Sissi. Foregoing servants for the evening, Sissi claims that she is a 'perfect housewife', having once made breakfast while on vacation with her mother, and plays this role with glee as she shines Franz's shoes the next morning.

In the *Sissi* films, drag is immediately identifiable to all actors as performance. Outside of the idealized space of Possenhofen, none of the central figures in the films is satisfied with the identities ascribed to him or her, and drag performances highlight the melancholy nature of the ruling class, even when these rulers are represented as ideal models of a benevolent power system. In *The Fateful Years of an Empress* the performance of 'commonness' by Sissi and Franz in the previous film is reversed: the servants of the Italian aristocracy impersonate their employers at a gala for the Emperor and Empress in Milan that the local aristocracy has refused to attend in protest at the foreign rulers. The camera lingers on the awkward bows and curtseys of the bakers and tailors and on the simple conversation of the crossdressing servants, emphasizing the anxiety that surrounds identity within the films. The scene at La Scala opens with the entrance of the servants into the opera house, focusing on their uncouth behaviour (sharing sandwiches, talking loudly), so that the disparity between signifier (theatregoers in formal attire) and signified (the presumed aristocracy) is quickly apparent to the spectator. As if to

42 Claudia Breger points to the drag scene in Italy in which servants take on the identities of their employers, as well as to the identities of Sissi as 'tomboy', in the image of her father, and Franz-Joseph as 'mama's boy'. Breger, *Szenarien kopfloser Herrschaft*, pp. 183–88.

drive the point home, the La Scala scene includes a dialogue between an emissary of the court and the mayor of Milan in which they discuss how to rescue the situation to the satisfaction of the Emperor and Empress. Just as in the earlier instances of drag in the *Sissi* films (Sissi's performance as a common woman or as 'the perfect housewife'), the inauthenticity of the identity is immediately apparent. Sissi herself seems to enjoy the drag theatre, insisting on being introduced to each of the servants impersonating their aristocratic employers.

The function of this scene in the film cannot easily be explained in narrative terms.[43] Sissi has recovered from her illness and immediately resumes her royal duties, accompanying Franz Joseph on a trip through Italy, where the royal couple is extremely unpopular. Why is Sissi's miraculous recovery followed immediately by a trip away from Vienna, to a hostile territory? And why is the La Scala scene, at about ten minutes, so long? I would argue that narrative becomes increasingly unimportant in this final film of the trilogy; rather, *The Fateful Years of an Empress* in particular is characterized by a structure of melancholy, restlessness and alienation. The scene at La Scala simultaneously points to the fragility of identity and to the inevitable downfall of the Habsburg monarchy. Hence, the slippage between the Italian aristocracy and their servants is mirrored in the fragile hold on power by the Austrian monarchs themselves. The final scenes of *The Fateful Years of an Empress* depict the indignities to which Franz Joseph and Sissi are subject as unpopular monarchs, and a stable notion of home is all but deconstructed in this film. Rather, the *Sissi* films teach the spectator the lesson that all identity is failed performance and that home is a circumscribed and alienating concept.

The drag performances of the servants in La Scala are intercut with scenes depicting the aristocratic employers themselves, scenes which engage in a queering not only of class but of national identity. The noblewoman Beatrice complains about having to fetch her own wine from the cellar in the absence of her servants, admitting that she would have liked to attend the opera after all. When her husband complains that her desire to see the Habsburg Emperor and Empress is a form of treason ('You are after all an Italian!'), the noblewoman responds that she is something of a 'mixture': 'Yes, I was born in Hungary. My mother was Polish. My father was Russian. My grandmother was Swedish. A great uncle of mine was supposedly even an Eskimo.' Not only are Sissi and Franz Joseph strangers in their own empire; the Italian nationalists are likewise unable to rely on a stable national identity.

The Fateful Years of an Empress, and the trilogy itself, ends with scenes of humiliation and alienation in Italy. Rather than singing the imperial anthem of the Habsburgs (a hymn which was written by Joseph Haydn and subsequently chosen as the German national anthem), the Italians insist on singing a Verdi aria, thereby foreshadowing the inevitable decline of the Habsburg monarchy. The appearance of the royal couple at La Scala in Milan is followed by a trip to Venice, likewise characterized by hostility from the Italians and humiliation for the

43 Breger argues that this is a conservative moment in the film, as the depiction of the servants is unflattering. Ibid., p. 187.

monarchs. As the couple sails to Venice the crowds shun them, closing their shutters as the royal pair passes by. The Italians are moved only when they witness Sissi embracing her child after a long separation. Aside from this moment, Sissi is alienated within Italy; indeed, her numerous travels never assuage her *Wanderlust*. Hence, although the *Sissi* films have generally been classified as historical dramas and *Heimatfilme*, they seem rather to dramatize a crisis of homelessness than to celebrate the pre-Nazi German and Austrian homelands. Von Moltke has argued that the *Heimatfilm* depicts not only 'home' itself but also the departure from and return to home. Without the motif of departure, home is indefinable: 'The value of *Heimat* can only be known by those who have left it'.[44] Sissi is a Bavarian girl, yet she returns there only once, immediately after her wedding, and is unable to regain her equilibrium in this space once she has left it. Yet she experiences great homesickness in her adopted *Heimat* of Austria. She is fascinated with Hungary, the space of the final tableau of the second film. Sissi spends a great deal of time in Hungary in *The Fateful Years of an Empress*, and history tells us that Elisabeth of Austria loved this country. Yet Sissi's fondness for Hungary is never clearly motivated in the films. Early on in *The Young Empress* Sissi proclaims to her language teacher: 'I don't know why, but I am more attracted to Hungary than to any other country, even though I've never been there!' In this way, the denaturalization of the space of *Heimat* in Possenhofen in the opening sequence of the first *Sissi* film leads to ever more alienation in the subsequent scenes and films. Sissi is only able to imagine *Heimat* as an abstraction, a place she has never visited.

The nation of Hungary functions as a triangulating space for the forged reconciliation between Austria and Germany. What could be seen as a dramatization, in the 1950s, of a more desirable 'marriage' between Germany and Austria in the form of Sissi's triumphant journey down the Danube as the future Habsburg queen, turns out to be one of many scenes of conflicted national posturing. The end of the first *Sissi* film depicts the Empress sailing to her new *Heimat* of Austria, followed by an elaborate wedding procession. In the next film Sissi and Franz travel triumphantly to Hungary for their coronation as the dual monarchs of Austria and the kingdom of Hungary. And the final film ends with the coolly received arrival of the royal couple in Venice. In this way, national and familial identities are consistently triangulated and displaced. The family of the *Haus Österreich* (the house of Austria) is so big as to contain entire countries that reject the monarchs. Sissi is expected to learn all of the languages of these wayward 'children', and yet she never regains a sense of *Heimat* following the opening scenes of the trilogy. Rather, she travels incessantly and compulsively after the birth of her first child, unable to feel at home anywhere. She embodies the restless traveler, at odds with a traditional female identity. At her incognito meeting with Franz Joseph at Ischl she pulls out her zither, telling him the story of how her father taught her to play it, and of how he was a great traveler: 'Suddenly something inside makes him get up and go. I think I'll be just like him one

44 Von Moltke, *No Place Like Home*, p. 5.

day.' When Sissi becomes ill with a lung infection, she is not told to lie in bed but rather that she needs a change of climate. Sissi travels to Corfu and Madeira, where she says what she would 'most of all love' is not to return home to her husband and daughter, but rather 'to take a long journey by sea'.

Sissi's *Wanderlust* destabilizes not only national but also gender identities in the film. The figure of the traveling woman stands in contrast to the housebound Emperor. While his wife travels, Franz Joseph usually sits at home at his desk, a gigantic framed picture of a matriarch placed behind him (figure 4). Hence, the mise-en-scene associated with Franz Joseph could be linked to what Tom Brown has defined as a feminized 'decor of history': 'The decor of history is an excess of detail: detail in the mise-en-scene (decor, but also costume) that is excessive to the requirement of historical verisimilitude'.[45] The painting of the matriarch threatens to overpower Franz Joseph in these scenes, diminishing his stature. A smaller painting of Sissi is displayed to the side of Franz Joseph's desk, and the spectator is occasionally granted an oblique view of this picture. The paintings stage the power dynamics between the two women, overcoding the scenes with Franz Joseph, interrupting the verisimilitude of the Emperor at work and offering contradictory significations of these scenes. Brown uses the notion of the 'decor of history' to describe the space of femininity in historical dramas, in contrast to what he calls 'the spectacular vista' of the masculine historical gaze.[46] While Sissi travels, gazing over the beautiful vistas of Hungary, Madeira and Corfu, Franz Joseph is housebound; the queering of gender roles occurs in the case of both the Emperor and Empress.

This reversal of gender roles in the *Sissi* films has profound consequences for the relations between states. Sissi's unique contribution

45 Brown, 'Spectacle/gender/history', p. 159.

46 Ibid., p. 149.

Fig. 4. Franz Joseph at his desk in *The Fateful Years of an Empress*.

to politics is usually effected through the queering of gender roles, as in the scene in which she reconciles the rebel Hungarians with the Austrian court through the anti-traditional device of the *Damenwahl* (ladies' choice). By choosing the passionate nationalist Hungarian Count Andrassy as her dance partner at a formal ball, Sissi reconciles the parent and rebel states. However, Sissi's effectiveness is ultimately the product of her dangerous behaviour. Her popularity in Hungary is mediated by Andrassy, who has fallen madly in love with her. Thus, the reconciliation between these two nations is predicated upon the unstable ground of inappropriate romantic love. Indeed, within the trilogy, romantic triangulations abound. Just as Hungary triangulates the marriage between Germany and Habsburg Austria, Andrassy triangulates the marriage between Sissi and Franz Joseph, even physically standing between them in the final tableau in Hungary in *The Young Empress*. For his part, Franz Joseph engages in romantic triangulation through his rejection of Sissi's sister Nene, who ostensibly forgives Sissi for 'stealing' Franz Joseph in the first film only to respond to Franz Joseph's question in the final film as to why she has never married with the following confession: 'I will never love another man the way I have loved you'. The trope of impossible love that destabilizes the romantic dyad in the *Sissi* films mirrors the doomed relations between nations. In the wake of the fatal union between Germany and Austria during the period of Nazism, the *Sissi* films reflect the potentially destructive nature of romanticized unions rather than restage an idealized fusion of the former Nazi nations.[47]

Count Andrassy's impossible love for Sissi and her irrational love for Hungary not only queer the binary national and romantic structure of the films; these triangulations likewise point to a mode of temporality that destabilizes heterosexual notions of futurity. Queer temporalities would point to the nonlinear, a narrative that does not revolve around the reproduction of the heterosexual family, to a 'reproductive futurity',[48] or a heteronormative 'time of inheritance', as articulated by Judith Halberstam.[49] A notion of queer temporalities often links pasts (potentially repressed) with the present. In her introduction to a special issue of *GLQ* on queer temporalities, Elizabeth Freeman redefines performativity as a temporal term. Borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, she argues that 'cultural competence is a matter of timing. … We achieve comfort, power, even physical legibility to the extent that we internalize the given cultural tempos and time lines … for any number of encounters.'[50] Hence, queer temporalities would disrupt these time lines, engendering social failures through asynchronicity. Queer time is too late or too early, prematurely cut off or prematurely aged. Queer time would mark not the linear progression of the heteronormative family but rather 'the pause, the dilated melodramatic moment, the calendrical coincidence, the frozen gesture, the scene of martyrdom, the criminal motive, the textures, tempos, solidities, relativities of space/time'.[51] While queer time shares some of the qualities of the time of melodrama, it is far more concerned with suspensions and

47 Here, my reading differs from those of both Wauchope and Breger. Wauchope, for example, writes: 'the Sissi films present a popular, positive image of Austria to the world', in 'Sissi revisited', p. 176. Breger argues that the *Sissi* films offer a displaced apology for Nazism, in *Szenarien kopfloser Herrschaf*, p. 169.

48 Edelman, *No Future*, p. 9.

49 Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005), p. 5.

50 Elizabeth Freeman, 'Introduction', *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*, vol. 13, nos. 2–3 (2007), special issue on queer temporalities, p. 161.

51 Ibid., p. 169.

52 Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 30.

53 See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

54 In this context, see Halberstam, who links queer temporalities with the death drive that AIDS signifies, in *In A Queer Time and Place*, p. 2.

pauses, the temporality of the death drive, than with mourning the loss of the time of innocence. Linda Williams defines the temporality of melodrama as the tragedy of 'too late' for the innocent victim.[52] Seeking to reassert a moral legibility in a post-sacred world, melodrama is aware of its own tragic temporality.[53] Yet the temporal crisis associated with queer texts is one that always anticipates the empty time of death. Rather than imagining innocence lost, queer time interrupts the regeneration of innocence.

The *Sissi* films are filled with pauses and mistimings that threaten to stop time altogether: the stretching of time in the lengthy processions that constitute the finales of each film, the coincidences and meetings that come too late, the thwarted kisses. The royal couple in particular is vulnerable to many such mistimings. Although the narrative insists on the eternal love between Franz and Sissi, the two are constantly separated and interrupted in their expression of love. And it is not only Franz's mother who instigates the separations between the lovers; Sissi herself leaves her husband each time there is a misunderstanding. In the beginning of *The Fateful Years of an Empress*, Sissi is in Hungary and has clearly been there for some time. When her family members arrive in Vienna at Schönbrunn to visit her, they are told: 'If you want to see the Empress of Austria, you will have to travel to Hungary'. Franz himself writes to Sissi requesting her return, and they meet by chance en route to one another. Sissi then promises to return to Austria upon one condition: 'a plea: a little more time for me'. For Sissi the problem is a temporal one. Yet it is not primarily Franz who has made it impossible for the couple to be together; rather, Sissi's constant travels keep the couple apart. In the film, then, the problem is both temporal and spatial. As Franz promises to spend more time with his wife and takes her to Ischl, the original scene of their passion, they enjoy a utopian moment together picking edelweiss. Yet it is precisely in the moment when Sissi and Franz Joseph run towards one another in romantic bliss that Sissi collapses in illness, just in time to interrupt the romance. The original romance in which Sissi played the part of a commoner cannot be repeated; the lovers are out of time, both too early and too late.

The interrupted kiss of the idyllic scene at Ischl is followed by news from Sissi's doctor that 'every kiss from her is contagious', a verdict that ostensibly forces her to travel to ever more exotic locations in order to avoid infecting her husband and daughter. For contemporary queer audiences, the 'contagion' of Sissi's love evokes the contagion of AIDS and the temporality that links love with a thwarted futurity.[54] A binary heterosexual matrix is consistently undermined in the *Sissi* films. The heterosexual couple at the centre of the Sissi 'fairytale' is unable to master the linear temporality that would provide for its successful future. Indeed, in the midst of travels and illness, Sissi expresses the revelation that characterizes all queer texts, even those that are celebratory: 'I feel myself that something in me is not quite right'. The melancholy contained in this statement, in the realization that one is different, that one will never feel 'at

home', is placed in the mouth of the most unlikely of figures, the beloved *Fräuleinwunder* (miracle girl) Romy Schneider. Yet Schneider/Sissi speaks here not only as a displaced Bavarian but also as a post-Nazi German and Austrian heroine for whom Germans and Austrians continue to feel a passionate attachment. She speaks, I suggest, the emotions of loss and homelessness that have haunted Germany and Austria since 1945.

On the face of it, the ending of the final film of the trilogy would seem to undermine the queer reading I am laying out here, which relies on a logic of cumulative displacements and triangulations. Here, the nuclear family (Franz Joseph, Sissi and their daughter Marie) is reunited before the eyes of the Italian people and the church. The formal and the intimate can be said to collapse, as the reconstitution of the nuclear family coincides with the return to power of the monarchs. In this scene, one could argue, the nation and the family meet and are sanctioned by the church – a perfect moment of national identity. Yet this scene is, ironically, the only one in *The Fateful Years of an Empress* in which the family trio is depicted together. In all three films combined, the nuclear family appears as a unit only twice: once for a few seconds, after the birth of Franz Joseph and Sissi's daughter, and once in this concluding scene of the trilogy, before the eyes of the angry Italian subjects. When Sissi and Franz Joseph attempt to visit their newborn baby in her nursery in *The Young Empress*, they discover that she has been removed by Franz Joseph's mother. Once again, the nuclear family tableau is interrupted and thwarted. In the final tableau of *The Fateful Years of an Empress*, Sissi's mother has brought Marie to Venice and Sissi exclaims, with some surprise, 'That is our child!'. The artificiality of the moment in the midst of the spectacle of the royal procession is highlighted by the fact that the child has been effectively irrelevant throughout the final film of the trilogy. This scene seems to reaffirm a heterosexual matrix for power. As Edelman has argued, the child regulates political discourse, standing in for a futurity that allies with a heterosexual logic: 'The sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer'.[55] Indeed, one might imagine that the child has returned just in time to rescue the film from its queer triangulations and displacements. The reemergence of the child could, then, correspond to the end of Sissi's melancholy travels.

The child in the Venice tableau is, however, a daughter – a figure who will not secure the future of the dynasty. What is more, the scene itself is shot in a manner that complicates linearity and slows the movement of time. As in the previous processional tableaux which constitute the finales of all three films (sequences which last for about a quarter of the films' length), this finale engages in a mode of editing that stretches time. The long walk down the red carpet is dictated by the formalities of the court, and is presented via a series of shots from a variety of angles that slows the movement of the figures significantly. A medium shot of the couple emerging from a boat and slowly traversing the red carpet is followed by a long shot from a similar angle, giving the impression that the characters

55 Edelman, *No Future*, p. 28.

are moving at a snail's pace. The camera then cuts to members of the Italian audience who are immobile, watching the procession. The trumpeters have ceased playing, and the hostile public is silent. Shots of the statue-like extras are intercut with another medium-long shot of the monarchs from the front, enhancing the feeling that time is slowing dramatically as they walk towards the camera. As Sissi and Franz finally make it past the camera, they emerge from the right hand of the screen, followed by more shots of the Italian spectators. When the camera returns to the royal pair, once again following their movements from behind, they have hardly progressed at all on the red carpet. A medium shot of the couple and cuts to the spectators are followed by a long shot of Sissi's child, Marie, at the other end of the red carpet. The child then begins to run, and the camera tracks alongside her past two of the guards who line the carpet, suggesting that she has traversed a reasonable amount of space. Yet when the camera pulls back to shoot mother and daughter running towards one another, we see that almost no space has been covered at all, and the moment of reunion is delayed ever more by the cuts between the running child, and mother and child running towards one another.

This scene of ostensible familial harmony engages in a mode of temporal stretching that destabilizes the narrative flow. It reveals a temporality that belies simple linearity, one that fetishizes a moment outside of time, a slowing that threatens to fix time in allegory. The final tableaux of the first two films in the trilogy are strikingly similar in form and content. The final minutes of both films depict royal processions, subject to the same mode of temporal stretching that characterizes the procession in Venice in *The Fateful Years of an Empress*. In the first film, when Sissi and Franz Joseph marry, both the procession to the church and the walk down the aisle are edited in the same manner as the reunion scene in Italy. The spectator repeatedly watches Sissi pass by in the coach, moving from left to right onscreen, so that the arrival is suspended indefinitely. The camera is positioned within the crowd, yet the film spectator views the passing of the royal couple multiple times. Similarly, the walk down the aisle is shot from a variety of angles, and these shots are intercut in such a manner as to slow the process of arrival significantly. Once the coach has finally reached the cathedral, the wedding procession of the couple is depicted. The first view of Franz Joseph and Sissi in the cathedral is a long shot from the perspective of the bishops and priests at the altar. Franz Joseph walks alone towards the camera, and Sissi follows with her mother and Sophie, the Emperor's mother. The Emperor passes four of the five guards lined up along the red carpet, almost reaching the altar, when the scene cuts to a shot of the bishops followed by a shot of Franz Joseph from behind. Here, he is just beginning to pass the first of the five guards, revealing that he has actually lost a great deal of ground, echoing Marie's frustrated run to her mother in the final film. For her part, Sissi also loses ground, though Franz Joseph's speed and subsequent regression are even more dramatic. Similar shots are intercut throughout

the wedding scene until the wedding couple finally reaches the large group of officials crowding the altar.

The concluding tableaux of all the films include numerous extras and an allegorical cast of characters comprising bishops, royal family members, and important political and romantic figures. For example, in the final tableau of the second film, Sissi and Franz Joseph are crowned as monarchs of the Hungarian state, and this pageantry is shot in a manner closely resembling the wedding scene of the first film. Shots of church bells are intercut with scenes from the perspective of the crowd as the royal coach passes by. The church plays a central role symbolically in all three films, so that these scenes seem to hark back to an older mode of staging and storytelling.[56] In the second film, the final tableau includes Sissi and Franz Joseph, their respective royal families, the bishops and Graf Andrassy himself, who stands in-between Sissi and Franz Joseph as Sissi cries with joy. The bishop, the former rebel Hungarian count, Franz Joseph – positioned as a relative outsider – and Sissi stand together, offering an overcoded melange of symbolic meanings. The crown itself seems to hover between Sissi and Andrassy, as if levitating on its own, signifying a transferable royal power (figure 5). In the final moments of the film the camera cuts to a closeup of Sissi's face as tears roll gently down her cheeks. As the camera moves in, Franz Joseph is cut out of the scene, so that Sissi and Andrassy fill the frame alone. The final shot is a closeup of Sissi's face, though the frame continues to capture a portion of Andrassy's coat, metonymically signifying a destabilization of the royal dyad. In the final procession of the first film, a triangulating figure is again part of the scenario, for Nene is prominently figured in the wedding tableau. Hence, all three final tableaux constitute romantic and cultural displacements, both in spatial and temporal terms.

56 Lang and Marksteiner point to the baroque *Inszenierungsrausch* (ecstasy of representation) in these scenes, arguing, in contrast to my own reading, that the endings offer a scene of religious harmony. Lang and Marksteiner, 'Im Schatten seiner Majestät', p. 30.

Fig. 5. The final tableau in Hungary in *The Young Empress*.

57 Edelman, *No Future*, p. 7.

58 Ibid., p. 23.

The temporal stretching that is common to these final tableaux constitutes a break from linearity, reflecting a queer mode of temporality and the structure of melancholy. Indeed, these tableaux seem to delay 'progress', to threaten stagnation or regression.[57] Edelman proposes that a queer mode of temporality would constitute constant negation, the consistent indulgence of the death drive, during which 'The energies of vitalization ceaselessly turn against themselves'.[58] The staged reunion between mother and daughter might seem to elude such a reading, but when considered alongside the final tableaux of the first two films these tableaux reveal a discomfort with heteronormative temporalities that signify the progress of history and stable national identities. Indeed, through a formal mode of framing and the slowing of time, the films cease at some point to link the past and the present in a linear manner. Rather they present moments that are out of time and place, atemporal and ahistorical. They resist both an optimistic futurism and a regressive mode of nostalgia. Nostalgia is the desire to return to the time and place of an idealized childhood, yet the slowing of time in the *Sissi* films resists the harmonious representation of a utopian past. The mode of affect here reflects a post-Nazi German and Austrian melancholy: a displaced remorse due to the guilt associated with past crimes, a suspension of mourning through repression of that which is lost. Indeed, guilt disallows the transition from melancholia to mourning, so that the temporal stretchings of the processional scenes can be seen as formal attempts to delay the arrival of the future.

The final tableaux of the *Sissi* films culminate in allegorical staging. Indeed, the choreography of these scenes, positioning central figures from the cast of characters together with symbolic political and religious figures, recalls the apotheosis endings of pre-Enlightenment drama and of a 'cinema of attractions', as described by Tom Gunning. Gunning argues that while narrative is dominant in classical cinema, early cinema emphasizes 'display' over storytelling. Early films in particular, such as Georges Méliès's *La Voyage dans la Lune* (1902), end in apotheosis:

> This ending, which entered cinema from the spectacle theater and pantomime, provided a sort of grand finale in which principal members of the cast reappear and strike poses in a timeless allegorical space that sums up the action of the piece. The apotheosis is also the occasion for scenic effects through elaborate sets or stage machinery, as well as the positioning of the performers (often in the form of a procession, or an architectural arrangement of figures, with actual characters often supplemented by a large number of extras precisely for their spectacular effect).[59]

59 Tom Gunning, ''Now you see it, now you don't': the temporality of the cinema of attractions', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 32 (1993), p. 10.

60 Ibid.

These apotheosis endings, according to Gunning, produce a 'non-narrative form of closure ... they effectively halt the narrative flow through an excess of spectacle, shifting spectator interest from what will happen next to an enjoyment of the spectacle presented to them.'[60]

The spectacular tableaux that constitute the endings of the *Sissi* films offer a mode of reception based on non-narrative elements, in a manner that resembles the apotheosis endings characteristic of baroque drama and early cinema. While the *Sissi* films most certainly engage in a mode of storytelling that we associate with classical cinema, the final scenes of all three films offer overcoded tableaux that resist modern interpretation. The narrative flow is broken by the slowness of the pageantry and the spectacle of the overcrowded staging, and the editing of the final processions slows time even further, dramatically delaying arrival and closure. What is more, the allegorical tableaux with which all films end offer images that are simultaneously overburdened semantically and insufficiently closed. As Alice Kuzniar tells us, 'allegorical narratives tell the truth about the failure to read' and always offer, therefore, a queer mode of semiotics: 'Through its privileging of visibility allegory pretends to open, direct statement, while actually it calls attention to the breach between sign and referent'.[61] Hence, for Kuzniar as for Craig Owens, 'allegory is always already queer … through its oblique, disconcerting signification'.[62] The allegorical tableaux at the ends of the *Sissi* films offer a pause in the narrative of modernity, a queer rupture in the fairytale of benevolent power.

And here we return, via allegory, to Sontag and camp, to the performative that always reveals the lack, the irreconcilable relationship between signifier and signified. I have argued that a queer mode of temporality and representation structures the most popular West German and Austrian films of the postwar period. Indeed, whereas camp and its related mode of representation, allegory, might be associated with a *jouissance* of representational excess, I would argue that they function in the *Sissi* films to reveal the melancholic affect of loss, of irreconcilability that must ultimately accompany all drag performances. The royal processions in the *Sissi* films threaten to slow time almost to the point of stopping, with their repetitive gestures and endless suspension of arrival. Hence, what might be perceived as a queer mode of melancholy, the melancholy of the abjected, is displaced yet again in a post-Nazi context. Whereas queer melancholy is characterized in large part by feelings of shame, the melancholy of the perpetrators of the Holocaust is fueled not only by shame but also by guilt. Thus the temporal stretching that threatens to stop movement altogether might be more closely allied to a desire for timelessness, a resistance to both nostalgia and progress, than to a longing for returns.

The fantasy of timelessness and placelessness is imagined most concretely in *The Fateful Years of an Empress*. Sissi spends much of her time in Hungary in the company of Count Andrassy, who invites her to a party – what he calls a *Mulatshak*. A *Mulatshak* is, Sissi discovers, the 'signification of a space of time of a few hours. Every Hungarian believes that he is in heaven and that all angels are gypsies.' Here time and place are queered, and all partygoers can take on the identity of those who have been oppressed. Of course, the role of the gypsy indicates freedom from convention, but for post-Holocaust German and Austrian audiences of the

61 Alice Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 8–9.
62 Ibid., p. 14.

Sissi films, the gypsy signifies a group that was targeted by the Nazis. Thus, the escape offered by the *Mulatshak* and, by extension, by the films as a whole, complicates a regressive nostalgia for a time before guilt. Far from staging a triumphant return of the Germano-Austrian Nazi power dyad, the *Sissi* films reflect a restless, frustrated melancholy, a reprieve from identification with the guilty party. This restlessness is depicted in the opening shot of *The Fateful Years of an Empress*: here, hundreds of birds spell out the letters for 'Sissi', only to disperse and fly away as the credits begin. In the final scene a flock of birds flies over the royal family in Venice, reminding the viewers of the fragility of the order depicted in the opening shot. By sidestepping a harmonious representation of the past, these films offer their spectators a momentary slowing of time, a temporary reprieve from the linearity of modern history. In this sense, the true pleasure afforded by the films would be to render diverse German and Austrian spectators 'gypsy' for the 'space of time of a few hours'. This mode of spectatorship, then, would offer post-fascist German and Austrian filmgoers a form of escape that is both straight and queer. As gypsies, out of time and place, diverse spectators remain intimately attached to the melancholy affect of homelessness and alienation that haunts the *Sissi* films.

Cinema that *stays at home*: the inexportable films of Belgium's Gaston Schoukens, Edith Kiel and Jan Vanderheyden

CATHERINE FOWLER

As Walter Benjamin observed, there was a time when cinema was treasured for its capacity to allow us to 'go traveling' whilst remaining 'calmly' seated:

> Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder … so that now … we calmly and adventurously go travelling.[1]

1 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', reprinted in Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 690.

This essay examines films which, it will be argued, do not want their viewers to go traveling but instead offer them something that is more like a night spent at home. The wider applicability of cinema that wants to *stay at home* will be considered here through a case study of a number of popular films made in Belgium between 1939 and 1957 by Gaston Schoukens (working in Brussels) and Edith Kiel with Jan Vanderheyden (working in Antwerp). Both Schoukens and Kiel/Vanderheyden paid careful attention to the local audiences at which their films were directed. They used locally popular actors and locations and regional accents to invite a sense of 'ownership'. They also adapted well-known and even current stories, novels, plays, revues and news to invoke a sense of a shared time and place or an 'adjacent experience'. The explicit intention of these films to stay at home is evident in comments from their makers. For example, Schoukens

2 Quoted in Guy Jungblutt, Patrick Leboutte and Dominique Païni (eds), *Une Encyclopédie des Cinémas de Belgique* (Crisnée, Belgium: Musée d'art Moderne de Paris et Editions Yellow Now, 1990), p. 223 (my translation).

3 Vanderheyden, quoted in the *Revue Belge du Cinéma*, no. 25, 21 June 1936, p. 1.

4 Charles R. Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 9.

5 Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'The inexportable: the case of French cinema and radio in the 1950s', in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 141.

asserted: 'I don't aim to create art … I simply want to entertain … no accomplished tracking shots, no interesting camera angles for me. No! homegrown scenes, with homegrown people and gags.'[2] Meanwhile, Vanderheyden proudly claimed: 'I showed the Brabant area, with *De Witte*, filmed in Dèmer valley near Diest and Aerschot; I showed old Flanders, with *Uilenspiegel* made in the historic cities of Bruges and Damme; on the outskirts of Antwerp … the folkloric interest of these films … also doubles as a tourist attraction, with obvious benefits, even now.'[3]

Despite its stated aim of addressing a local audience, the work of Schoukens and Kiel/Vanderheyden was marked by a tension between its unpretentious, down-to-earth ideals and the use of 'escapist' tactics to create a feel-good joviality or cliched stereotypes of 'the Belgian'. The success of this aim to stay at home was therefore somewhat mitigated by the difficulties associated with any suggestion that films made under the producer/consumer model might either function in a way akin to folk music and folk tales or elude their illusionist and escapist mode and address their audience in a more 'casual' register. In staying at home, the films to be discussed aspired to address their public as a community or extended family that was 'familiar' rather than 'foreign'. Accordingly they invited identification as homegrown and knowable. When studying such films, keeping them at home allows us, first, to create a template for a mode of address that is locally specific and temporally contiguous, and, second, to examine the problematic that such a mode creates between what we might think of as auto-expression and auto-exoticism.

This case study is drawn from the relatively ill-defined field of Belgian cinema. The wider interest of stay-at-home cinema lies in, to borrow a phrase from Charles R. Acland, its recalibration of our 'understanding of relations between local and [national] … film cultures'.[4] First and foremost this recalibration will be undertaken by expanding the notion of 'inexportable' cinema. Jean-Pierre Jeancolas uses the term to describe films produced in Europe from the sound period to the mid 1950s as:

> low-grade … [and] destined to be seen only by audiences in their country of origin … inexportable, because they were too insignificant and/or unintelligible to be appreciated by spectators outside a given popular cultural area, which was at once uncouth, coded and based on recognition. The inexportable cinema would … take on an ideological flavour, not only through its referents, its subjects and the way they are treated in it, but also in relation to the time when the films were shot and distributed; indeed it is precisely this relationship with their first spectators that is their main interest.[5]

Taking up Jeancolas's final point, this essay will consider the 'adjacency' of the films to their audiences as the key source of interest. In the absence of the opportunity for audience-based research it will explore the development of a mode of address that emphasizes the formulaic and familiar through repetitive narratives, the iteration of casting and setting, and an accentuation of the local in advertising. Contrary to Jeancolas, it

will be argued that such an emphasis produces results that are more than merely partial and specific to one 'popular cultural area'.

This recalibration will also be undertaken through the development of two theoretical concepts. Focusing in the first instance on Gaston Schoukens's work, the notion of 'homegrown' cinema will be examined; then the idea of the 'the casual register' will be developed by turning to Kiel/Vanderheyden. Both concepts are central to the notion of adjacency. They can be used to explain how these directors explicitly constructed their films for local audiences and to suggest the broader implications of Schoukens's and Kiel/Vanderheyden's work for those critics and theorists interested in expanding the usefulness of the notion of inexportable cinema.

The critical uptake of Jeancolas's notion of the inexportable has not been extensive, perhaps because of the hint of stubborn inapplicability implied by both the term itself and Jeancolas's French examples. The latter imply that his inexportable French cinemas are so explicitly context-based, addressed to a local audience and unconcerned with all standards of critical significance (such as artistic and aesthetic values and taste) that they simply cannot be decoded and will not survive the rhetorical travel of wider scholarship. To allow for applicability whilst reading cinema at home, we need to find additional terms that value the home context. To start, we might conceptualize cinema that stays at home as being that part of 'a national cinema … that draws on indigenous cultural traditions'.[6] As Andrew Higson points out, searching for a way to include the indigenous in his study of national cinema, 'According to a strict dictionary definition, an indigenous action, event or idea is one whose origins can be found in the locality in which the action, event or idea is performed'.[7] Clearly the notion of the indigenous is of use because it values the local more highly than the inexportable, yet at the same time we must admit that not all indigenous cultural traditions are inexportable and, to return to the framing argument, that some indigenous traditions have in fact travelled well. Given this, we need to add more vocabulary to the indigenous if we are to describe the particularity of the Belgian case.

To explain in more detail why the cinema of Schoukens and Kiel/Vanderheyden must be examined while at home we might call on other examples of 'small' national cinemas, whose potential for cross-national exploitation is effectively immobilized by specific markers of national culture, such as language and geography. Useful examples are cited by Tytti Soila, Astrid Söderbergh Widding and Gunnar Iversen regarding cinema production in Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland and Sweden. They acknowledge that for many countries the 'national' has been conceived of as consisting only of the 'international', and suggest that they will offer a corrective to this tendency by focusing on 'popular film, which has been seen by a majority audience in the country where it was made and which has been perceived by this audience to be specifically national'. Here the national is being treated 'as a culture that *stays within*

6   Andrew Higson, 'The instability of the national', in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 36.

7   Ibid.

8 Tytti Soila, Astrid Söderbergh
   Widding and Gunnar Iversen,
   Nordic National Cinemas
   (New York, NY and London:
   Routledge, 1998), p. 2 (my
   emphasis).

9 Alexandra Schneider and Vinzenz
   Hediger, 'Functionaries with hearts
   of gold: TV comedians as
   vernacular movie stars in
   Switzerland', in Tytti Soila (ed.),
   *Stellar Encounters: Stardom in
   Popular European Cinema* (New
   Barnet: John Libbey, 2009), p. 68.

itself',[8] a term which echoes the staying-at-home tendency noted in the Belgian examples.

As this essay will show, the act of staying within/staying put involves a certain amount of auto-expression that turns the spotlight onto markers such as language, history, (national) character and geography. However all nations are not created equal, and whereas for Scandinavian cinemas these markers can be said to constitute hubs of unity, for Belgium they create divisions. To tackle the particularities of the Belgian case it is necessary to add one further critical term: 'vernacular'. The fact that language in particular is a source of division in Belgium explains why the adoption of 'the vernacular' facilitates so effectively the ambition of films to stay at home. The term 'vernacular' has been used by Alexandra Schneider and Vinzenz Hediger in relation to Swiss film stars to suggest a kind of local expression. The authors coin the phrase 'vernacular movie stars' to describe a preponderance of actors from other media (in particular television) starring in homegrown (and thus largely inexportable) Swiss productions. They argue that these 'Vernacular stars are what they are much closer to home'. This application of the vernacular will be extended to encompass a 'casual register'.[9] Hence, like the inexportable, the indigenous and that which 'stays within', the vernacular embodies both the local specificity and temporal contiguity that characterize cinema that wants to stay at home.

In the case of those filmmakers studied here, the notion of cinema that stays at home needs to be situated in relation to three further contexts: historical, stylistic and critical. The first concerns the small-scale, linguistically divided Belgian market, combined with the particular conditions of Belgium during World War II. The period covered by this study extends from immediately before World War II to nearly fifteen years afterwards. For the prewar and war period it is easy to see how export would have been almost impossible for a small nation such as Belgium. This was exacerbated by the occupation of Belgium from May 1940 until liberation in September 1944, with censorship in place and distribution and production controlled by Germany. Admittedly, the occupation of Belgium made it harder for national product to be exported, yet even after liberation Schoukens and Kiel/Vanderheyden made films as if those barriers were still erected. The second context relates to the films themselves, with their mode of address that invites identification of a very local audience. These films did not travel because they were made for a long-wave national or local audience, with no intention of broadcasting beyond that frequency. The third context concerns the critical reception of these films, which have been largely unregarded; mentioned in histories of Belgian cinema but subject to critical approbation, and noted purely because they existed at a time when there was little other continuity within Belgian film production. Accordingly, these films stayed at home because they were obscured by the 'travelling' Belgian national, which has typically focused on directors of the time such as Charles Dekeukeleire and Henri Storck.

10 Paul Davay, *Les Mémoires d'un glouton optique* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1995), p. 38.

11 Jacqueline Aubenas, entry on 'Combat de Boxe' in Aubenas et al. (eds), *Belgian Cinema/Le Cinéma Belge/De Belgische Film* (Brussels and Amsterdam: Royal Film Archive/Ludion, 1999), p. 158.

12 As recounted by Paul Thomas, *Un Siècle de Cinéma Belge* (Ottignies: Quorum, 1995), p. 47.

13 Philip Mosley, *Split Screen: Belgian Cinema and Cultural Identity* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 55–56.

14 Schoukens, quoted in Jungblutt, Leboutte and Païni, *Une Encyclopédie des Cinémas de Belgique*, p. 142.

The preference of discerning home-based critics for the work of these two filmmakers is illustrated in the writing of 'optical glutton' Paul Davay in his record of sixty years of cinephilia in Belgium.[10] Davay's meticulous recollection of film culture in his home country includes Storck and Dekeukeleire as a matter of course in accounts of screenings of Carl Dreyer's, Abel Gance's and Sergei Eisenstein's early films. From the start of his filmmaking career, Dekeukeleire's obsession with cinema turned his work outwards to the international avant garde, thus producing a body of work that could be held up to the scrutiny of international critics who were quick to compare him with, and include him in, this scene.[11] With Storck we find a similar pattern of international renown and influence. Storck's first foray into filmmaking saw him spending time in Paris as assistant to Pierre Billon and Jean Grémillon before collaborating with Jean Vigo on *Zéro de Conduite* (1932).[12] He soon returned to Belgium and collaborated with Joris Ivens on *Misère au Borinage*, which has been compared by Philip Mosley to 'the Grierson production *Housing Problems* … in its powerful indictment of slum housing conditions'.[13] He then concentrated on Belgian subjects for rest of his career.

Whereas reviewers of Dekeukeleire and Storck commented on their well-constituted style, the films of Schoukens and Kiel/Vanderheyden offered little to commend them. They tended to suppress style; indeed this was a necessity if the 'casual' relation to their audiences was to be maintained. Since they aimed to speak on a local level, international critics found no reason to recommend them to a wider audience, while national critics ignored them for chauvinistic reasons. In order to explore further the value and functions of this cinema that stays at home it is necessary to turn to the films themselves.

Folklore is my pet subject: the typical bruxellois from Belgium is as good a breed as the Parisian from Ménilmontant.[14]

Schoukens's work can be roughly divided into three periods, interrupted by the war years: 1929–34, 1935–38 and 1939–59. His features ranged in style from musical comedies (*Un gosse pour 100.000 francs/The 100,000 Franc Kid* [1934]) to farces (*Le Cadavre no. 5/Body No. 5* [1932]; *Si tu vois mon oncle/If You See My Uncle* [1933]) and historical revues (*Les quatre mousquetaires/The Four Musketeers* [1934]). The years from 1935 to 1938 could be seen as Schoukens's 'Gustave Libeau' period, in which he collaborated with this actor and stopped trying to hide the 'Belgian-ness' of his cinema, making *En avant la musique/On with the Music* (1935), *C'était le bon temps/Those Were the Days* (1936), *Mon père et mon papa/My Father and My Daddy* (1937), *Gardons notre sourire/Let's Keep Smiling* (1937) and *Bossemans et Coppenolle/ Bossemans and Coppenolle* (1938). It is these latter few films that will form the basis for my exploration of the homegrown.

Examination of the opening years of his career suggests that Schoukens was very aware of the changing market for his films and more than able to

adapt to it. He was never to lose sight of what was going on in cinemas internationally, and during this early period he made use of French stars (Alice Tissot, Mona Sem), even passing some of his films off as French by signing himself 'Felix Bell'. Having considered the critical reception of Dekeukeleire's and Stork's artistically respectable films it is interesting to note the different tone to reviews of Schoukens's work in Belgian sources. Although the commercial aspect of Schoukens's films was occasionally admitted and even praised, in other instances his alleged low aesthetic ambitions were criticized. As Schoukens developed his rapport with Gustave Libeau and emphasized the Belgian-ness of his films, so criticism shifted to develop more paternal expectations and the tone of the reviews changed. To explore what underlies the critical reception of Schoukens's work we need to turn to the notion of the homegrown.

As indicated earlier, Schoukens said repeatedly that being an artist did not interest him and he wanted instead to foreground the homegrown nature of his films. The evocation of a point of origin or 'home' that homegrown suggests recalls the stasis expressed in the notion of staying at home. More importantly, with the homegrown come two further aspects, both of which connect with the theoretical frame signalled earlier. The first is an explicit suggestion of ownership, of a cinema that *belongs* to the context in which it circulates, that echoes Higson's definition of indigenous cinema 'whose origins can be found in the locality in which [it] is performed'.[15] The second is a suggestion of closeness to origin which raises the notion of authenticity. In the films to be discussed, ownership is suggested through the repetition of familiar plots and characters, settings and themes. Meanwhile closeness to origin is present in the emphasis on a shared context, both through recognizable settings and the reference to wartime experiences with which the audience would have been familiar.

Yet Schoukens's easy assertion of the homegrown elides its paradoxical status, since the escapist characteristics of cinemagoing typically involve leaving behind one's context. Nataša Ďurovičová points out what is at stake for an audience watching the homegrown in a Swedish context:

> For a Swedish spectator to opt for [national productions] is … to agree to engage with entertainment whose referent and [stylistic] modality obliterate your relationship to, and identification with, your specific social context to a lesser degree; no matter how internally serialized … they never reach a degree of abstraction for their audience comparable to a Hollywood genre film, for better or worse.[16]

Schoukens may have insisted that his films denied the obliteration noted by Ďurovičová, yet, as we shall see, a certain degree of abstraction was restored to them through the use of song or their overriding air of joviality. Thus a double register of recognition and abstraction operated in Schoukens's work. Abstraction can also be thought of as a tendency to auto-exoticize that has been recognized by writers such as Higson in

15 Higson, 'The instability of the national', p. 36.

16 Nataša Ďurovičová, 'Some thoughts on the intersection of the popular and the national', *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 34 (1994), p. 8.

17 Higson, 'The instability of the national', p. 36; Rey Chow *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 176–77; François de la Brétèque 'Images of Provence: ethnotypes and stereotypes of the South in French Cinema', in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 58–71.

18 De la Brétèque, 'Images of Provence', p. 69.

19 David Martin-Jones *Scotland: Global Cinema Genres, Modes and Identities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 17.

20 *La Libre Belgique*, 1 February 1935, n.p.

21 Anonymous review of *Mon père et mon papa* in the library of the Cinémathèque de Belgique.

22 *La Libre Belgique*, 1 February 1935, n.p.

opposition to the indigenous, Rey Chow in a Chinese context and François de la Brétèque writing on French films' use of Provençal images.[17] De la Brétèque claims that:

> For the 'foreign' public [Provençal images] smack of the exotic – home-grown to be sure, but exotic none the less. For the people concerned they screen representations that some, with irritation, may dispute but in which many recognize themselves.[18]

The resistance an audience in Belgium may have had to the accentuation of the local is amply suggested by both Durovičová and de la Brétèque. Faced with films that emphasized their localness, the spectator must grudgingly 'agree', sometimes 'with irritation', to participate. The dialectic that arises between homegrown and exotic revolves very precisely around context when the films are shown to home audiences, and around decontextualization when shown outside of that circle. The problem of such a double register is often solved in films through the use of irony, pathos and wit. David Martin-Jones presents us with an example of such an approach. In a discussion of the concept of autoethnography, he suggests that for Scottish filmmaking a strategy has developed through which 'stereotypical images of Scotland are deployed, but framed ironically to target international audiences and simultaneously address local viewers with a knowing wink, inviting complicity in the sale of national stereotypes'.[19] In Schoukens's films there was a complete lack of this knowingness; consequently he never fully resolved the problems associated with the double register described by de la Brétèque.

The uneasy doubleness of Schoukens's films was also picked up by Belgian reviewers of his work. A growing sense of ownership over Schoukens's practice is detectable if one traces reviews from his early period to his work with Libeau. His first films were often directed under a pseudonym to disguise their Belgian origins; thus a reviewer noted of an early film: 'The author of this French/Belgian film prefers to remain anonymous'.[20] Only two years later the tone changed to one of intimacy as Schoukens was described by *Revue Belge du Cinéma* as *notre compatriote*.[21] Despite the change in tone, there was a consistent sense across reviews that Schoukens's out-and-out commercial aims might reduce the value of his films. Thus the reviewer of *Un gosse pour 100.000 francs* described the film as: 'This gross farce which has spectators rolling with laughter', and finally condemned the film for its imitation of an American film (*M. Bébé*).[22]

It would seem from reviews that critics' willingness to embrace Schoukens was dependent upon how such a gesture would be seen from outside – most importantly from France. Ironically, then, the rising sense that Schoukens 'belonged' to Belgium produced an increasing anxiety that Belgian cinema would be judged only through Schoukens's 'jolly' farces, giving a sense of 'guilty' enjoyment to reviewers. These same criticisms applied throughout his work, but the agenda changed as he became increasingly recognized as homegrown. For example,

Schoukens's use of actors talking 'Bruxellois', the regional French accent of Brussels, became a source of shame rather than pride. Since the promotion of Belgian culture in general was an onerous task, we can see why Schoukens was never going to be embraced as a 'national hero' for promoting aspects of Belgian culture on screen. However, we need to turn to the films themselves to test exactly how this double address was present in the plots and casting of Schoukens's films. Discussion will centre upon the Libeau period, when the actor regularly took the role of a father who was centre of the community. The narrative trajectory set him up for a fall of some kind before reuniting everyone for the final sing-song which he, of course, led.

De la Brétèque's words on French Provençal images raise the possibility of a comparison between Schoukens and Marcel Pagnol, and by extension Libeau and Raimu, which inevitably positions Libeau in comparison with Raimu. Pagnol, who was making films in France in the prewar period, has been described as contributing 'more than anyone to the promotion of Provençal culture'.[23] Unlike Pagnol, Schoukens was rarely the writer of his films and perhaps this is why, despite both filmmakers dealing with character types, those in Schoukens's films – apart from the ebullient characters played by Libeau – were rarely fleshed out enough for the audience to care about them. Alan Williams describes Pagnol as 'ultimately … an artist who spoke for his native Provence', and he suggests the 'art' of Pagnol as being present in the way his films

> employ extensive exterior scenes shot on location, actors mostly from the midi (including some non-professionals) and sober, unflamboyant shooting and editing styles which place emphasis on image-content rather than on the film as storytelling agency. His soundtracks … place great emphasis on the rhythmic musicality of his characters' speech.[24]

In contrast to this appreciative description of Pagnol, Schoukens's direction remained the subject of some derision. Though his style might also be seen as relatively 'unshowy', not drawing attention to itself, there was never a suggestion that such a style might be 'sober' (and thus intended to set a certain mood) or that it should be congratulated for being 'unflamboyant'. Schoukens's films necessarily excluded the stylistic flourishes one might expect from an auteur director (such as André Delvaux); style never got in the way of subject, which was filmed mainly through medium shots, attaching character firmly to background. Dialogue and performance were of the upmost importance in his films, and the narratives became an excuse for showcasing these two elements. Yet there were also occasional moments when he seemed to experiment, such as in *Un 'Soir' de joie/A 'Soir' Full of Joy* (1954) when he used swish pans to link scenes.

C'était le bon temps, a film set in *belle époque* Brussels, is a good example of how Schoukens's unshowy style developed. The film begins with an introduction to its cast of characters, all of whom are found in and around a restaurant owned by Jean-Baptiste (Libeau). There are several

23 Ginette Vincendeau, entry on 'Marcel Pagnol' in her *Encyclopedia of European Cinema* (London: British Film Institute/Cassell, 1995), p. 323.

24 Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: a History of French Filmmaking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 203.

layers of space to the restaurant, from a stage where performers entertain the guests, to a drinking area in front of it, a kitchen behind the scenes where meals are prepared and a family room. These layers allow for the movement of different classes of characters as well as those with different functions, from cameo appearances of guests to the sub-characters of the kitchen and the main actors of the family. The main plot of the film concerns Jean-Baptiste, who is also the captain of the Garde Civique, investing both his and his company's money in an oil company which at first appears to be fraudulent but ultimately makes him rich – having discovered not oil but gold. The narrative trajectory undertaken by Libeau, from being his normal ebullient self to falling from grace before rising back to good fortune, is a familiar one in all of Schoukens's films, and even those films which broke with the musical/farce genre retained some of its common elements. What should be evident from this description of just one Libeau film is the lightweight nature of Schoukens's subject matter. To assess the correspondence with Pagnol further we need to turn to Libeau.

Gustave Libeau began his film career in *Le Mariage de Mlle Beulemans* (Julien Duvivier, France, 1927), based on perhaps the most famous play in Belgian theatre history, by Fonson and Fernand Wicheler. From this role onwards he played the stout patriarch, fond of his food and drink and forever meddling in his family's affairs, while in reality blissfully unaware of what was actually going on (figure 1). Schoukens's confidence in Libeau was such that much of his work from 1935 onwards was developed around the actor. Thus in *Mon père et mon papa* Libeau was cast as a kind-hearted foster father opposite Jules Berry as the natural father, while in *Gardons notre sourire* he played a greengrocer whose role in the resistance in World War I required him constantly to disguise himself.

Whilst Libeau did not reach the actorly heights of Raimu, as noted, his role for Schoukens was crucial as he became the axiom of joviality. From Libeau's portly, fatherly demeanour, his love of a drink and merriment, and his involvement (or meddling) in his workers' or friends' business, an overriding air of good-natured jollity extended from him to the films in general. This took different forms, from the insistent use of music and song in some films to a seeming inability to take things seriously in others. It is debatable whether this mood produces a shallow collection of films or whether we should simply see Schoukens's desire to please manifesting itself in the feel-good factor. At the time his films were released they were often accompanied by adverts highlighting their laugh-a-minute quality, with one advert promoting *En avant la musique* as 'lively songs … a burst of laugher from beginning to end',[25] while *Bossemans et Coppenolle* was rereleased in 1950 as the 'the joyous adventures of … '.[26] There were also some enthusiastic reviews claiming that 'there is no doubt that every Bruxellois will be amused by this *zwanze*[27] humour',[28] and some were even assured that it had national appeal as 'essentially Belgian … understandable in all our regions'.[29] However, many reviewers took offence at these light-hearted films, citing 'the incurably vulgar mediocrity of … jokes' as objectionable.[30]

25 Unsourced advert for this film, found at the library of the Cinémathèque de Belgique.
26 Ibid.
27 Frédérick Sojcher explains this term as a humour that was 'typically bruxellois – a mixture of good nature and common sense', in Sojcher, *La kermesse héroïque du cinema belge: des documentaires et des farces 1896–1965*, Volume I (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), p. 103.
28 This is taken from an uncredited review.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.

31 Schoukens's entrepreneurial nature should be noted by the fact that his first sound film, *La famille Klepkens*, recorded dialogue in both French and Flemish dialect; he followed the success of this with short films recorded in Flemish, while at the same time distributing several French sound films. Hence his eventual loyalty to the Bruxellois dialect might be posited as a coincidence of the success of his main actor and of subsequent Bruxellois films.

Schoukens might have used his homegrown qualities as some kind of excuse for his meagre means ('no accomplished tracking shots'), turning his practice into a 'poor' cinema for the people, but reviewers rejected his assumed familiarity and would often distance themselves from him. The local character of his films was evident in the use of popular and successful plays and the acquisition of a troupe of actors, including Libeau, most of whom spoke with a Bruxellois accent (a further similarity with Pagnol and his favoured Provençal accent).[31] Another consistent trait was the dramatization of key events that his home audience had experienced, particularly the two world wars (in *C'était le bon temps* and *Gardons notre sourire*). Yet the identification that a local audience might have with this local character was in tension with the overriding air of joviality, and for critics the Bruxellois Belgian in evidence was a source of shame rather than pride.

To some extent the work of Edith Kiel and Jan Vanderheyden (figure 2) followed a similar trajectory to that of Schoukens: great success for their early films followed by a gradual descent into the formulaic; some success after the war but a decline towards the end of the 1950s. However, a clear difference between Kiel/Vanderheyden and Schoukens exists in the way that they worked during World War II, for as head of the Film Production

Office Vanderheyden was able to ensure that he alone received the privileges necessary to carry on making films.

Kiel/Vanderheyden's main reference point outside Flemish Belgium was Germany. Their first few films used German and French studios for interiors until their Antwerp studio was ready in 1939. Kiel had been born in Berlin and had worked at the UFA studios before coming to Belgium and working with Vanderheyden; many of their musical productions borrowed from the German romantic musical, although they were always poorer in scale. As with Schoukens's films, Kiel/Vanderheyden's productions also emphasized local character. Paradoxically, this appeal to the local that guaranteed them a stable audience also ensured its limited nature. Vanderheyden is said to have been encouraged to make films for a Flemish market through the success of his first endeavour, which was to dub several French and German films into Flemish. His response to a perceived need might be seen in relation to Soila's assertion that 'The creation of a national cinema is thus a decision which originates in a need that is presumed to exist which is thereby also presumed to arouse sympathy in the audience'.[32] However, on the same subject Frédérick Sojcher reminds us that 'It must be remembered that at this time there were all sorts of Flemish dialects. Films using dialects therefore had a limited appeal.'[33]

Kiel/Vanderheyden nurtured a sense of adjacency most emphatically through character and narrative, both of which conformed to what we might now refer to as a 'soap opera' range. This range consisted of repetitive characters and situations, a large cast of young and old – so that the appeal of the whole family was held – prominent female characters and an episodic structure. Particular examples of this range can be found in their first few films: *Uilenspiegel left nog!*/*Uilenspiegel Lives* (1935)

32 Soila et al., *Nordic National Cinemas*, p. 3.

33 Sojcher, *La kermesse héroïque du cinéma belge*, p. 102.

Havenmuziek/*Music in the Harbour* (1937) *Een engel van een man*/*The Man's an Angel* (1939) *Wit is troef*/*White is Trump* (1940) and *Janssens tegen Peeters*/*Janssens versus Peeters* (1940).

Despite the large cast of characters and the 'down-to-earth' emphasis on a regional setting, Kiel/Vanderheyden's films often leant towards caricature, as in the two *Janssens* films: *Janssens tegen Peeters* and *Janssens en Peeters dike vrienden*/*Janssens and Peeters Reconciled* (1940), starring Charles Janssens, one of the most prolific actors in Flemish films up until the 1960s. As these series films indicate, favourite characters were aired repeatedly for audiences in different contexts. Perhaps because of the influence of Kiel, who wrote all the scripts until after the war when she took over completely from Vanderheyden, who was jailed for collaboration, their stories are more well developed than those of Schoukens. Their first and most famous film, *De Witte*/*Towhead* (1934), was adapted from the novel by Ernest Claes. The story tells of the adventures of a cheeky young boy in a small village. The star of the film, Jef Bruyninckx, was to reappear in many Kiel/Vanderheyden productions, until some years later when he turned to directing himself, producing some respectable films. It could be argued that Flemish audiences and critics saw in *De Witte* something that belonged to them, which addressed them in their own language – and even used their argot – and which aimed explicitly to please. Although the sustained output of Kiel/Vanderheyden undoubtedly paved the way for a Flemish film industry, it is perhaps a measure of the perceived uncouthness of their work that, once the roots of this industry had being planted in the 1960s (thanks to government funding), the aim was to lead it away from this embarrassing memory.

In a video about twenty-five years of Flemish filmmaking, Hugo Claus recalls a story about Vanderheyden on a film set, shouting instructions which were drowned out by the sound of a passing tram. Someone suggested he use a megaphone and handed it to him, but some time later Claus recalls seeing Vanderheyden still shouting in vain, with the megaphone dangling by his side. In contrast to the dynamic image which is frequently painted of Schoukens, Vanderheyden is depicted as rather less than inspired, and indeed his own creative input is frequently questioned. The ratio of the collaboration between himself and Kiel is often thrown into doubt, and Kiel is said to have claimed after his death that their films were actually hers alone.

Like Schoukens, Kiel/Vanderheyden drew from local theatre and revues and their films featured a sense of theatricality in their structure. For example *Het Schipperskwartier*/*The Bargee District* (1953) opens with a documentary commentary talking about different cities – London, New York, Paris, Antwerp – and then shows us the street of the title before introducing the cast. The plot tells of the attempt by Jef to find a suitable blind date for his best friend Rik, and concludes with Rik falling for a girl who works in his cafe and winning a prize on the lottery. The use of space in the film is more ambitious than in some of Schoukens's work, though it is also often less effective, as Kiel worked with few means and was forced

to use and reuse her sets. Familiar settings across her films were the Antwerp Port and various shops, a grocery, a bar, the house of the grocer, and a cafe. In *Het Schipperskwartier* settings are used to delineate character, thus the two main characters Jef and Rik have their own places of business – a cafe and grocery respectively – as well as male (the bar) and female (the home) spaces. These last two spaces in particular delineate the various communities who comment upon the action and the main characters.

Casting was just one of the ways in which these films attempted to speak to a constituency that was local or national, but rarely international. More importantly, a vernacular or 'casual' register derived directly from the artlessness of Kiel/Vanderheyden's work. In the absence of obtrusively cinematic techniques such as skilful editing, experimental use of sound and image as used by Dekeukeleire and Storck, or a symbolic discourse at the level of mise-en-scene, the less cinematic elements dominated, from performance and dialogue to plot. As a consequence, the relation between the films and their audiences might be seen to be closer and more vernacular or 'casual'. Such a term is used by Dudley Andrew to encompass the soft boundaries between various popular forms in the 1930s and by John Ellis to describe television viewers who relate 'casually rather than concentratedly'[34] to what they watch.

In an essay on French popular cinema in the 1930s, Andrew uses a comparison of the films *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*/*The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (Jean Renoir, 1935) and *Rigolboche* (Christian-Jacque, 1936) to discuss the ways in which the boundaries between cinema, music hall and other noncinematic spectacles were still relatively fluid. He suggests that by referring to these other forms the films invited a relationship between performers and spectators. Examples he uses include the performance 'community that applauds or shouts down characters and actions', the 'live performers [who] fostered neighbourhood values as opposed to the homogenized international appeal of the cinema' and the 'circus acrobat [who] relates casually to those he or she entertains, almost like a neighbour'.[35] With its accent on entertainment and its iteration of actors, plot and setting, Kiel/Vanderheyden's work bears comparison with these popular forms of entertainment.

Ellis's reference to the casual nature of television viewing is also applicable to Kiel/Vanderheyden's work once we consider the soap opera qualities of their films. The parallel drawn here between television and Kiel/Vanderheyden is meant to refer not so much to the viewing differences of the home space, with its attendant distractions, but rather to formal and stylistic differences of their films that also contribute to their casual register. In developing a tentative description of television form, Ellis notes the lack of artfulness that is characteristic of the small screen, and the way that television 'develops specific forms of narration, and specific forms of organisation of its material'.[36] The televisual link can be extended once we examine the 'soap opera' range of the majority of Kiel/Vanderheyden's films.

34 John Ellis *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), p. 128.

35 Dudley Andrew 'Family diversions: French popular cinema and the music hall', in Dyer and Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema*, p. 19.

36 Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 115.

37 Victor Perkins, 'The Atlantic divide', in Dyer and Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema*, p. 194.

The focus, when examining a selection of their work, will be upon this casual register; however it should be acknowledged that there are difficulties associated with suggesting that cinema might operate on such a level. Reflecting on 'some of the consequences of setting up popular European cinema as a category for scholarship', Victor Perkins warns: 'There is no folk cinema to parallel folk music or folk-tales since access to the apparatus of production is so restricted by its cost and complexity'.[37] This is not to suggest that Kiel/Vanderheyden represent a 'folk' cinema, or even a 'cinema of the people', since it is very clear from accounts of their practice that they were engaging in the producer/consumer model of production. However, the industrial structure of cinema in Belgium was then so underdeveloped that these films could be close to their audience in terms of where and how they were made, who starred in them and the plots that were chosen.

Kiel/Vanderheyden's films offered a formula that gradually became familiar to viewers and built upon audience expectations. This formula was partly established through such elements as the repeated use of the same actors and actresses (including Jef Bruyninckx, Pola Cortez, Frits Vaerewijck, Charles Janssens and Co Flower), the economic necessity of shooting in their Antwerp studio (thus on recognizably the same sets), and a preponderance of 'community' films. In key films such as *De Witte*, *Uilenspiegel left nog!*, *Het Schipperskwartier* and *De hemel op aarde*/ *Heaven on Earth* (1954), a large cast of men and women, young and old, were gradually introduced, all of whom would in some way impinge on the central intrigue, usually an *affaire du famille* or an act of matchmaking.

Kiel's work has been criticized for being largely unadventurous. The speed with which she released films, as well as their miserable budgets, in part explains this accusation. However, once the model of soap opera is applied to Kiel/Vanderheyden's output, valuable nuances become evident. As Christine Geraghty writes: 'The basic staple of soaps is the difference between men and women, between the public and personal spheres, between work and home'.[38] All of Kiel/Vanderheyden's films set up gendered divisions, with couples needing to be formed, families to be reconciled and even the youngest members in conflict with each other. This was emphasized particularly in the *Janssens* films, since each of the families represented the son or daughter whose union cemented the first film and provided the conflict for the second.[39] This gendered division was also manifest at a spatial level: the male characters frequently met in a bar or at work, with the women also at work or in a family space. In all cases these spaces were associated with daily routines: dropping in for coffee on the way to work, buying the day's groceries, or making a public rendezvous with a possible partner.

Several of their films featured strong matriarchal characters, including wives, mothers and grandmothers. *Het Schipperskwartier*, which was one of their most successful films, firmly establishes a strong community of women of all sorts – from a shopkeeper to the mother of the main

38 Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera: a Study of Prime Time Soaps* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p. 7.

39 Indeed this story was used as the basis for a sitcom in the 1990s. See Aubens et al. (eds), *Belgian Cinema*, p. 284.

protagonist and a younger girl. Through this gradation of women several themes are introduced, including romance, marriage, motherhood and old age, with several women cast as gossips and meddlers. The role of gossip in this and other films echoes its role in soap opera; according to Geraghty, it 'helps to create the feeling of day-to-dayness. … More importantly, gossip … constitutes a commentary on the action.'[40] The narrative of *Het Schipperskwartier* concerns attempts by several members of the community to find a partner for a widower who has three children; it also allows the women to play a variety of roles. On the one hand there is the wife of a shopkeeper and a meddling old woman, on the other there is a pair of middle-aged wooers of Charles Janssens, one of whom is figured as predatory and the other as sweet.

Although love, family and work were the preoccupations of most of Kiel/Vanderheyden's films, the regular ensemble of characters ensured that these themes were de-dramatized in a manner akin to soap opera. Geraghty characterizes identification as being 'decentred' in soap opera, saying 'it is invited across a range of characters not with a particular central figure',[41] and although Charles Janssens's characters typically drove the central intrigue of the narrative, providing points of conflict and resolution, the characters who surrounded him provided an important sense of daily routine and community. Indeed 'ideals of community' were crucial to these films, which in common with soap opera exhibited an 'ethos of sharing, an acceptance of each other's individual characteristics and a recognition that everyone has a role to play if the community is to continue'.[42] The accent on the coming together of disparate characters was usually reinforced by the endings of these films, in which a song was sung. With its stress on providing a familiar experience, we might assume that the casual register had the same effect as Schoukens's claims to be 'homegrown'. However, in contrast to the homegrown's emphasis on its local attributes, the casual register was constituted via reference to other entertainment forms and to narratives that took on soap opera characteristics.

The films of Schoukens and Kiel/Vanderheyden explored here have more usually been taken to fulfil Jeancolas's assertion that inexportable films are 'destined to be seen only by audiences in their country of origin … too insignificant and/or unintelligible be to appreciated by spectators outside a given popular cultural area'. This essay has focused on their 'relationship with their first spectators',[43] arguing that Jeancolas's assessment is too harsh. Expressed through a vocabulary that values the home context as indigenous, staying within itself, and vernacular or casual – notions that insist on an attentiveness to reading at home – the value and function of the films of Schoukens and Kiel/Vanderheyden becomes evident.

An unexpected finding of this study has been the utility of televisual models rather than cinematic models when attempting to conceptualize modes of delivery and address for these stay-at-home films. The locally specific and temporally contiguous mode of address of all the films evokes

40 Christine Geraghty 'The continuous serial: a definition', in Richard Dyer, Christine Geraghty, Marion Jordan and Terry Lovell (eds), *TV Monograph 13: Coronation Street* (London: British Film Institute, 1981), p. 22.

41 Ibid.

42 Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera*, p. 85.

43 Jeancolas, 'The inexportable', p. 141.

44 Judith Franco 'Cultural identity in the community of soap: a comparative analysis of *Thuis* (At Home) and *Eastenders*', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4 (2001), p. 454.

45 Ibid., quoting Geoff Mulgan, 'Television's holy grail: seven types of quality', in Geoff Mulgan (ed.), *The Question of Quality: the Broadcasting Debate* 6 (London: British Film Institute, 1990), p. 20.

televisual rather than cinematic viewing experiences, suggestive of the small screen in the home space rather than the large screen in the auditorium. If television provides useful models to explain how films address audiences 'at home', it is also the case that television scholarship provides insights into how we might summarize the value and function of examining these films in their home context. In a recent essay on Flemish soap opera in which she rails against the genre's associations with 'low' culture, Judith Franco reminds us that the 'purpose of television is to create a community of watchers, engaged in the same activity in real time, sharing experiences, fictions or characters'.[44] Franco then asserts that soap operas, which undertake this task with such success, therefore 'qualif[y] as *quality* television par excellence … not because of their art, or even the size of their audience, but because of their role within the history of the community they serve'.[45] Might the same function not be claimed for the films of Schoukens, Kiel/Vanderheyden and the many other filmmakers whose work is so proudly inexportable?

Metropolitan vs rural cinemagoing in Flanders, 1925–75

PHILIPPE MEERS, DANIËL BILTEREYST AND LIES VAN DE VIJVER

1 Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: the Practices of Film Reception* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000).

2 Helen Richards, 'Memory reclamation of cinema going in Bridgend, South Wales, 1930–1960', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2003), pp. 341–55; Helen Taylor, *Scarlett's Women: Gone With The Wind and its Female Audience* (London: Virago, 1989).

3 Jacky Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship in 1940s and 1950s Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994); Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: IB Tauris, 2002).

4 Richard Maltby, 'On the prospect of writing cinema history from below', *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2006), pp. 74–96; Robert C. Allen, 'Relocating American film history: the problem of the empirical', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2006), pp. 48–88.

5 Richard Maltby, 'How can cinema history matter more?', *Screening the Past*, no. 22 (2007).

6 Maltby, 'On the prospect of writing cinema history from below', p. 91

7 Richard Maltby, Daniël Biltereyst and Philippe Meers (eds), *Explorations in New Cinema History* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010 forthcoming).

Over the last decade we have seen a growing interest in the spatial and social conditions of the cinematic experience. This initially rather theoretical interest[1] has since been translated into studies of exhibition, programming, case studies of specific cinemas and, most importantly, into oral history projects focusing on memories of cinemagoing up until the 1960s.[2] Some of these oral history studies are now considered state-of-the-art examples in the understanding of social and cultural meanings of cinema.[3] But as we shall show, there is more to studies of cinema culture than doing oral history.

Filling the gap between textual and structural analysis and providing a bottom-up approach of lived cinema cultures, there is an active debate on what these (still fairly unusual) approaches mean for doing film or cinema history.[4] In this respect, Richard Maltby makes a useful distinction between film history and cinema history, and between 'an aesthetic history of textual relations between individuals or individual objects and the social history of a cultural institution'.[5] For the latter, we need 'detailed historical maps of cinema exhibition, telling us what cinemas were where and when', but also 'the inclusion of experience that will ground quantitative generalisations in the concrete particulars of microhistorical studies of local situations, effects and infrastructure'.[6] This new inclusive and multilayered approach, of which this research note claims to be an example, has been coined by Maltby as the 'new cinema history'.[7]

Our research focus is on Flanders, the densely populated northern region of Belgium which was for decades considered to support a liberal,

8 With the exception of only a few case studies on film exhibition in particular towns or periods. See Guido Convents, *Van kinetoscoop tot café-ciné: De eerste jaren van de film in België 1894–1908* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2000).

9 'The "Enlightened" City: Screen culture between ideology, economics and experience. A study on the social role of film exhibition and film consumption in Flanders (1895–2004) in interaction with modernity and urbanization.' Based at the universities of Antwerp (UA) and Ghent (UGent). Promoted by Philippe Meers (UA), Daniël Biltereyst (UGent), and Marnix Beyen (UA), and funded by the FWO/SRC-Flanders.

10 A wave of similar projects is being done in Europe, the USA and Australia. Many of the researchers are involved in an international network, the Homer project (the History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception), <http://homerproject.wmblogs.net/>. See also Maltby et al. (eds) *The New Cinema History*; Daniël Biltereyst, Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers (eds), *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity: European Perspectives on Film Cultures and Cinemagoing* (forthcoming).

11 See Daniël Biltereyst, Philippe Meers and Lies Van de Vijver, 'Social class, experiences of distinction and cinema in postwar Ghent', in Maltby et al. (eds), *Explorations in New Cinema History*.

12 We will not go into the methodological debate on the use of oral history (for research on cinemagoing). See Annette Kuhn, 'A journey through memory', in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (New York, NY: Berg, 2000), and 'Heterotopia, heterochronia: place and time in cinema memory', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2004); Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998). We are inspired by Kuhn's use of the term 'memory text', in Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, pp. 9–12.

highly open and lucrative film market. Being one of the most industrialized countries in Europe before World War I, the small kingdom had a lively film exhibition scene with high attendance rates as well as a wide range of luxurious and other cinemas. Cinemagoing quickly became a popular habit, not only in the urban context but also in smaller communities. As one of the few countries without any form of enforced film censorship, the country largely maintained a liberal film policy. Films from all major film production centres were available – with a predominance of US and French titles – leading to a wide choice for audiences. An important feature of the vibrant Belgian film scene was the special interest taken in film exhibition by ideologically and/or politically inspired groups in society. Political parties, workers' movements and Catholic organizations acknowledged that cinema as a popular modern mass medium was important in influencing values, norms and ideologies among the wider populace. Key players in this part of the film market were, in sociopolitical terms, the different pillars (hence the phenomenon of 'pillarization') of Belgian society. The socialist party started organizing picture shows in its 'peoples' houses' and Catholic priests provided what the church labelled 'good cinema' in parish halls.

In contrast to the USA, the UK and other major European countries, exhibition structures, programming strategies and cinemagoing experiences in smaller countries, including Belgium, largely remain open for research.[8] To fill in this research gap, we have designed a three-layered research project, 'The "Enlightened" City',[9] which focuses on film exhibition and consumption in the region of Flanders.[10] The first part covers an extended inventory of all (existing and historical) Flemish cinemas, focusing on the geographical distribution, and the relations between the commercial and the ideologically inspired, pillarized circuit. The second part includes a diachronic institutional analysis on a city level, with case studies on film exhibition and programming in Antwerp (Flanders's largest city with a population of just under 500,000) and Ghent (the second industrial city with some 230,000 people).[11]

This research note reports mainly on the third part, which consists of an oral history project on the lived experiences of cinemagoing and leisure. As well as questions on the differences between urban and rural areas, we were also interested in the specifics of the Belgian case, in particular the role played by the different political factions or the Catholic Church: how, for example, these institutions influenced everyday practices of going to the films; or how Catholic cinemagoers dealt with the morally restrictive views of the Church towards commercial cinema.

The design of the oral history project was very much invested in allowing analysis of the differences between metropolitan areas, provincial towns and rural villages.[12] A second aim was to broaden the diachronic scope of the study, covering half a century of cinema experiences (1925–75), to allow an analysis of important evolutions over time. Thirdly, the unique mix of commercial and ideological cinema

13 Daniël Biltereyst, 'The Roman Catholic church and film exhibition in Belgium, 1926–1940', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2007), p. 206.

14 There were 155 interviews conducted in Antwerp, sixty-one in Ghent, and 173 respondents in twenty-one towns and villages. The respondents were recruited in old people's homes, within the social circle of acquaintances of the interviewers or by self-selection (responding to ads in local newspapers).

15 The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the software programme Atlas-ti.

16 Although many respondents talked about this as if it were one homogeneous period, we acknowledge that it is a broad timespan, from the heyday of filmgoing to the decline in audience attendance. However, these are considered by our respondents as developments within the same film culture, in contrast to the next phase, the introduction of the multiscreen cinema.

17 On a political economy analysis of audiences, particularly connected to cinema, see Daniël Biltereyst and Philippe Meers, 'The political economy of audiences', in Janet Wasko, Graham Murdock and Helena Sousa (eds), *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications* (Malden: Blackwell, forthcoming 2011).

18 We will no go into detail on methodological questions. For an elaboration of the triangulation argument, see Biltereyst, Meers and Van De Vijver, 'Social class, experiences of distinction and cinema in postwar Ghent'. See also Annemone Ligensa, 'Triangulating a turn: film 1900 as technology, perception and culture', in Annemone Ligensa and Klaus Kreimeier (eds), *Film 1900: Technology, Perception, Culture* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2009).

19 For a typology of cinema memories, see Annette Kuhn, 'What to do with cinema memory', in Maltby et al. (eds), *Explorations in New Cinema History*.

exhibition[13] stimulated discussion on top-down forces (structure) and their bottom-up experiences (agency).

To cover all these varieties of cinema culture, we selected what is probably the largest set of oral history interviews gathered on this topic to date (389 in-depth interviews).[14] Although statistical representation was beyond the scope of this study, we composed a sample systematically stratified by age, class, sex, ideological background and location in order to grasp a wide variety of routines and practices of cinemagoing. The interviews were conducted in 2005 and 2006 in the home environments of our respondents by trained graduate students from the universities of Antwerp and Ghent. The interviews were semi-structured, in that the interviewers used a thematic spreadsheet to keep the interviews focused but also had enough time to allow respondents to develop their stories as they wanted. The length of the interviews differed depending on the storytelling capacities of our interviewees, with an average length of around one hour per interview.[15] Taking into account that the peak of an individual's filmgoing occurs before the age of twenty-five, the majority of our respondents' stories focused on the period between 1925 and 1975.[16]

On a conceptual level, the study connected with the recent shift in contextualizing experience and agency within structures and ideology, whereby critical ethnography and the political economy of audiences are back on the agenda.[17] Thus we tried to tackle the problem of some oral history projects on cinema, in which nostalgia has become a central feature that possibly obscures the role played by race, class, and religious and political affiliation. A key feature of the 'The "Enlightened" City' oral history project is that it was embedded within a broader analysis, linking oral histories on cinemagoing experiences with other layers of information, such as basic geographical data, and the identification of the politically or ideologically inspired cinemas and their programming. This approach allows for a multilevel analysis, using triangulation as a central principle: corroborating data on one specific phenomenon, in this case cinema culture in Flanders, from different angles and by various methods, and integrating layers of findings into a complex picture of cinema culture.[18] These multiple layers allow for comparative insights covering the whole spectrum of cinemagoing practices over five decades in metropolitan areas (from picture palaces to neighborhood flea pits) and rural villages, both in commercial and ideological cinemas. This exercise of data triangulation, or the projection of oral history data onto a broader structural and ideological canvas, makes it possible to understand the relevance of the audience's experiences and agency within specific structural constraints.

The analysis of the interviewees' stories of their cinema experiences in Antwerp and Ghent made it clear that these memories were strongly focused on the social act of cinemagoing rather than on particular films.[19] Different cinemas were linked with different types of

20 As did the film audiences in Nottingham, in Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sara Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), p. 47; and in Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic.*

21 Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, p. 17.

22 For triangulation in the case of Ghent, see Biltereyst, Meers and Van De Vijver, 'Social class, experiences of distinction and cinema in postwar Ghent'.

23 In the case of Ghent, the distinction between the film theatres in the city centre and those in the neighbourhoods was less marked in personal memories. The geography of film exhibition in Ghent was not as focused on one centre as it was in Antwerp. In fact, Ghent had four commercial centres each with their own leisure activities. Variation in the geographical outline thus intervenes in a different mental mapping among respondents.

24 See Richards, 'Memory reclamation', p. 346, for a similar hierarchy of cinemas in the town of Bridgend in the UK.

entertainment, genres, class distinction and particular social routines, which were seen as more important than the film itself.[20] A key issue, in the case of both Antwerp and Ghent, was the distinction between the picture palaces in the city centre and the smaller neighbourhood cinemas. The film exhibition scene in both cities, and how it was remembered, was very closely linked to the unique (cultural) geography of the city. As Annette Kuhn has argued, some of the most persistent memories are place-related, since 'place is extraordinarily insistent in memories'.[21]

In the case of Antwerp, we were able to triangulate the vast amount of oral history findings, including the mental maps of cinemagoers, with the diachronic maps of cinemas and with data from the programming analysis, which gave us information on scheduling strategies (first run, second run, and so on) and characteristics of genre and origin of film.[22] The geographical map showed a high concentration of cinemas in the city centre, around the De Keyzerlei (the main shopping street), in the central station area and in the different neighbourhoods surrounding the centre.[23] As for programming, there were city centre cinemas focusing upon specific genres and countries (Cinema Astrid was known for German films; Odeon for French pictures), while other venues in the centre clearly specialized in premier films (such as Rex with continental European films and Rubens with 70mm Hollywood blockbusters). Neighbourhood cinemas showed mostly American films. This centre-versus-periphery division was clearly reflected in the social class of the audiences. In short, three layers of data constructed a clear-cut hierarchy in cinemas, according to location, programming, social class connotations and experiences.

Low down the social spectrum, spread across the various districts of Antwerp that housed poorer blue-collar workers, were the neighbourhood cinemas where people went 'almost in their pyjamas'. Then there were the city centre cinemas, remembered as luxurious, beautiful and comfortable, connoting upper-class tastes. These cinemas were as much an object of consumption and *rêverie* as the films they showed. What they lacked in atmosphere and familiarity they made up for in comfort, star-studded films and status. Or, as one interviewee (Rik, born in 1939) described them, 'they were temples', whereas 'now they are black boxes'. Although similar in terms of comfort, architecture and location within the city, some picture palaces were considered more open and approachable than others.[24] The city centre cinemas at the Astridplein (in front of the Central Station, such as Kursaal) were considered highly accessible. The city centre cinemas at the De Keyserlei such as Cinema Rex, built in 1935 as the flagship of the Antwerp cinema scene, were middle and upper class but still accessible to lower-class audiences. At the top end of the spectrum were those city centre cinemas (Anvers Palace, Scala) which were seen as strictly for the upper classes. Scala, a picture palace that had its roots in the boulevard theatre tradition, was just such an exclusive venue, with many respondents claiming that 'you had to be dressed almost in a gala outfit' to enter.

25 We notice, for example, the substantial decline in US films shown over the three decades: in 1952 these accounted for three quarters of films screened but by 1972 it was just one fifth.

26 For the UK, see Christine Geraghty, 'Cinema as a social space: understanding cinema-going in Britain, 1947–63', *Framework*, no. 42 (2000) pp. 7–8.

27 Although in Antwerp cinema attendance declined in the postwar period, the real decline of picture palaces in the city centre set in only in the 1980s.

28 Peter Stead, *Film and the Working Class* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989), p. 18; Jeffrey Klenotic, 'Four hours of hootin' and hollerin': moviegoing and everyday life outside the movie palace', in Robert C. Allen, Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes (eds), *Hollywood and the Social Experience of Movie-Going* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008).

29 Klenotic, 'Four hours of hootin' and hollerin'', p. 4.

30 In Ghent for instance, the two picture palaces in the city centre were wary of their neighbourhood audiences. Respondents can remember going through the back door for the cheaper seats, which would lead you unseen past the 'regular' audience. See also Jancovich et al., *The Place of the Audience*, p. 47.

31 This was a large cinema and part of an impressively luxurious, multifunctional community 'palace' in the bourgeois centre of Ghent. Although the socialist cinema occasionally included leftwing or more critical pictures in its programme (Chaplin was an excellent compromise), Cinema Vooruit mainly showed innocent commercial fare from big distributors such as Pathé. See Rik Stallaerts, 'De weg naar het paradijs: socialisme en filmvertoningen in Vlaanderen', in Daniël Biltereyst and Philippe Meers (eds), *De Verlichte Stad* (Leuven: LannooCampus, 2007), pp. 163–69.

The longitudinal research design (cinemas, programming,[25] experiences) allowed us to see how over time, many theatres shifted in status in the decades following World War II.[26] The 'mentally mapped' hierarchy faded over time, and by the 1970s, the clear-cut social distinctions had become blurred. The stories of the youngest respondents, born in the early 1950s, also heralded the decline of city centre cinemas. For the first time, words like 'worn-out' and 'old' were used to describe the once proud picture palaces, ringing in the dawn of a new cinema culture.[27]

When talking about different cinemas, respondents mostly referred to the audiences attending them, often characterized in terms of class and social distinction. In both Antwerp and Ghent, people living in the city and those who remembered frequenting the city centre cinemas mostly talked about neighbourhood cinema audiences as being 'uncivilized, loud and vulgar'. Agnella (1942, Ghent), for instance, claimed:

> We didn't go to the smaller cinemas. They were always packed and in our eyes a lesser kind of cinema. Because they would be belching, making noises, eating and smoking, and that wasn't for us. That was just too foul, it was the rabble having a party where one should just go to see a film.

Selective processes of social distinction clearly filtered how people talked about their filmgoing experiences. Picture palaces, though, were not limited to the higher classes, and in the Belgian context were often regarded as temples of classlessness.[28] But the actual experience of class mixing remained limited,[29] mainly because the different classes were often spatially segregated within one cinema. Even when they inhabited the same space, audiences did not simply shrug off their previous identities.[30] Selecting a theatre thus involved a choice about social status, class identity and audience segmentation.

The experiences and cultural practices of cinemagoing always relate to structural strategies of commercial and ideological organizations, which are aimed at attracting audiences. But the impact of these top-down forces can equally turn out to be rather low when looking at the bottom-up experiences of cinemagoers. This was clearly the case when interviewees talked about politically or religiously inspired film screenings. Ideological segregation was an important distinctive feature of the Ghent film scene, but even here most respondents tended not to overestimate its impact on filmgoing practices. Most people did not seem to be that well-informed, or were not clear, about the exact profile of specific cinemas. Respondents knew that Vooruit (Forward)[31] was the place for cinema and leisure within the socialist movement, but they were rather unsure about the ideologies of other film venues. They often considered Catholic cinemas to be associated with parochial work and morally conservative or prudish films, situated somewhat at the margins of the cinema business. Recognizing that some audiences were faithful to particular film venues, respondents

nevertheless questioned ideological loyalty in relation to cinema and other leisure activities. As G. M. (male, 1921) stated:

> There were two cinemas which were a bit Catholic, I think. They showed movies where there was nothing to see at all. Certain people went to these venues, I know, also because the church said they should avoid other cinemas, which were associated with the devil. …We didn't look at the political orientation of cinemas. We just knew that when you went to a Catholic cinema you shouldn't expect too much.

The interviewees thus preferred to talk about these cinemas' distinctive profiles in terms of differences in programming styles, degrees of controversy, ethics and audience expectation. Also in Ghent, the interviewees' mental mapping of cinema was mainly constructed on a multilayered concept of social distinction. As we shall see, Church organizations were far more successful in rural areas in maintaining their image as a powerful guardian of public morals, disciplining the field of cinema and the cultural practice of cinemagoing.

There has recently been a growing unease within cinema studies about taking the urban (or even more the metropolitan) landscape as the prime object of research, as scholars begin to acknowledge differences in the exhibition structure and film experience within villages and small towns.[32] Kathryn H. Fuller-Seely, for instance, states that 'the movies were as much part of the popular culture landscape of rural and small town areas as the nation's largest cities'.[33] This was also the case in many European contexts, and Belgium and Flanders is a peculiar case because of the interaction between metropolitan and rural cinema experiences. One of the most striking features of its cinema scene was the rapid spread of film theatres across the region, leading to a surprisingly high number of venues in most villages. Between 1945 and 1960, for instance, almost half of the Flemish film theatre scene was to be found in these rural areas.[34]

One of the key differences here was the influence of Catholic organizations on cinemagoing habits, which was much stronger in rural areas. Most small villages had one, two or even three film theatres, often including a Catholic and sometimes a socialist venue. In general, there was fierce tension between ideological and commercial theatres. Local priests preached against commercial venues in the pulpit, proclaimed their view of films at local markets, and made sure that the Catholic moral classification of films shown in the commercial theatres was nailed to the church door. Mark (1934, Liedekerke), recalled: 'Our local priest was absolutely against cinema … whenever he was in the pulpit during mass, he was preaching against it'. Local priests and Catholic laymen were active as exhibitors themselves in regular, even commercial, forms of film exhibition, often in local parish halls. 'Good Catholics', then, often had no other choice than to go to Catholic film theatres. However, and in parallel to the fading hierarchy within city cinemas, our diachronic data suggest

32 Robert C. Allen, who investigated film exhibition in the rural south of the USA, wrote: 'One of the most enduring and striking features of American film historiography is its assumption of a particular and in some accounts determinative connection between the experience of metropolitan urbanity and the experience of cinema'. Allen, 'Relocating American film history', p. 62.

33 Kathy Fuller-Seeley, 'Researching and writing the history of moviegoing', in Kathy Fuller-Seeley and George Potamianos (eds), *The Cinema in Non-Metropolitan America from its Origins to the Multiplex* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, forthcoming).

34 Philippe Meers, Daniël Biltereyst and Lies Van De Vijver, 'Cinemagoing, pillarization and the experience of discipline', in Daniël Biltereyst et al. (eds), *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity*.

Vooruit, Great Hall, Ghent, 1930.
Collection: Amsab.

a clear but gradual decline in ideological impact, as the phenomenon of 'depillarization' slowly reached villages in the 1960s.

Another striking feature of rural cinemagoing was the limited choice, but even though most villagers saw only one film a week, this did not mean that cinema was any less important for them. People used to dress up in their finest clothes when going to the cinema. Leisure activities for the whole family were limited, and cinemagoing was often the one activity in which everybody could participate. In villages with more than one film theatre, we noticed a mental mapping, with cinemas positioned in people's minds according to status, ideology and audience.

The comparative strand of the research design permitted us to investigate the relationship between cinemas in villages and in the city.

Eldorado, Ghent, 1951. Collection: State Archives Beveren (RAB/B13/755).

The perceived hierarchy of venues, from rural cinemas to the picture palaces of the nearest city, for instance, was similar to that between neighbourhood cinemas and city centre picture palaces. There were striking differences, however, such as the intensified sense of community. Seats were often numbered, and many villagers had a fixed day to go to the pictures and sat in the same seat every week. Because of the lack of choice in venues, mingling of different classes was considered normal, as farmers, doctors and storekeepers sat together in the same room and drank in the same theatre bar.

The relatively short distances between the rural and urban areas of Flanders facilitated villagers in attending city cinemas. This had a very distinct appeal, as much for the sensation of going to the city itself as for the glamour of the picture palaces. Going to the pictures was part of a trip to the metropolis as a whole. The attraction of the film theatres for villagers was much like the appeal they had for Antwerp cinemagoers (luxurious surroundings, premieres, and so on), but there was an

additional motive. Because of the strong sense of community and subsequent social control in the village cinemas, young couples often went to the city to spend some private time together.

In this brief account we have analyzed the lived experiences of cinemagoing in cities and villages between 1925 and 1975, confronting oral history with programming and the political–economic structure of the exhibition scene. We have shown how people remembered their rural cinemas, neighbourhood film theatres and picture palaces and how they regarded the area surrounding the cinema and the social geography of cinemagoing. This perceived image of the cinema negotiated with – but was not fully determined by – its actual geographical location or architectural value, or even by the films it screened. The study clearly showed how, in Flanders, cinema (linked to modernity) was far from merely an urban phenomenon. There were differences between locations, of course, such as the far stronger impact of Catholic ideology on cinema culture in rural areas. But modernity was not fully in opposition to the rural experience, as this complex interaction and influence proves.

This research note makes a case for the importance of 'writing cinema history from below'. With this project we have tried to draw a three-dimensional picture of cinemas, films, and cinemagoing practices, experiences and memories, thus combining different layers of historical data (structures, programming, oral histories). This multilevel approach, using oral history as a crucial component, is more than just a complement to classical film historical work. We believe it eventually delivers an altogether richer picture of film and cinema history, one where text, context and experiences are dealt with in a non-exclusive way.

reviews

Charlotte Brunsdon, *London in Cinema: the Cinematic City Since 1945*. London: British Film Institute, 2007, 256 pp.

Gail Cunningham and Stephen Barber (eds), *London Eyes: Reflections in Text and Image*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007, 192 pp.

IAN CHRISTIE

City film history is a relatively recent development, emerging out of the poststructuralist maze into which film studies strayed with a rather uncertain map but no shortage of signposts. The image of the modern city as conveyed by film has, of course, long been recognized, with the 'city symphony' already an acknowledged genre of the 1920s and 1930s. And even earlier, the films preserved as the Paper Print Collection at America's Library of Congress record both the street life and architecture of turn-of-the-century New York with extraordinary panache.[1] Yet none of this rich legacy of city films has cohered into a subject or a theme until recent years; and even when it has been broached in anthologies that are often structured by architectural concerns, London has figured significantly less often than those recognized capitals of modernity Berlin, Paris and New York.[2]

London, by contrast, has been represented cinematically as the paradigm of the antimodern. A contributor to *London Eyes*, Sara de Freitas, notes that, over a century, the city has seldom been shown in a positive light but rather as 'the archetype of the modern civic dystopia' (p. 177). Statistically, this may well be right. The two earliest surviving films made in and about London – Birt Acres and Robert Paul's *Arrest of a Bookmaker* and *Footpads* (both 1895) – are unlike films of the same vintage made anywhere else. Compared with Edison's vaudeville vignettes and the Lumières' genteel scenes of life in Lyons, both show violence as an everyday London experience.[3] Indeed, the theatrical backdrop of *Footpads* seems to represent Piccadilly Circus at night, suggesting that assault is an ever present threat to West End revellers.

1 See, for instance, films of the Ghetto fish market, or the erotic displays of *What Happened on 23rd Street* and *At the Foot of the Flatiron*, and many panoramas and skyscraper films.

2 Charlotte Brunsdon notes (pp. 19–20) how rarely London appears in anthologies, such as David Clarke (ed.), *The Cinematic City* (London: Routledge, 1997); François Penz and Maureen Thomas (eds), *Cinema and Architecture* (London: British Film Institute, 1997); Myrto Konstantarakos (ed.), *Spaces in European Cinema* (London: Intellect, 2000); Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds), *Screening the City* (London: Verso, 2003). However, I have contributed an essay on London to Thierry Jousse and Thierry Pacqot (eds), *La Ville au Cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2005).

3 One early Edison subject does in fact portray violence, and is appropriately set in London: *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots* (1895).

4 Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 137.

5 Simon H. R. James, *London Film Locations Guide* (London: Batsford, 2007); Tony Reeves, *Movie London* (London: Titan Books, 2008).

6 Colin Sorenson, *London on Film: 100 years of Film-making in London* (London: Museum of London, 1996). Sorenson was the founding curator of the Museum of London's Modern Department and an early promoter of London film history. The book and accompanying exhibition – currently on display in the new London Film Museum on the Embankment – marked Britain's celebration of the Centenary of Cinema.

As the historian Paul Langford records, the English did indeed have a longstanding reputation among foreign observers for 'gratuitous violence', so these distinctive founding films are in keeping with at least one aspect of the capital's image.[4] And throughout the subsequent century, London would continue to be represented predominantly under the signs of Dickens, Doré and Whitechapel, with crime, poverty and disillusion as its recurrent themes.

But what *is* city film history? Does it aspire to more than a conjugation of favourite or recurrent (but always selective) 'images' of a city? What can it say about the *status* of such images and our relation to them? From another kind of book that has also burgeoned recently, the locations guide, we know in considerable detail which views and buildings appear in films set in London.[5] The foundations of this approach were laid by the late Colin Sorenson in his invaluable *London on Film*, published to accompany a pioneering exhibition on the same theme in 1996.[6] But as a historian Sorenson wanted to go further than merely recording the history of production in and about the city, and his book suggestively links aspects of the city's structural and social history with recurrently used locations and genres that tell typical stories of London. Parallel to this approach, new concepts of urban space and our place in it were emerging which would transform attitudes towards city film history. Translations of Henri Lefebvre, Michael de Certeau and Guy Debord, together with such London writers as Iain Sinclair, Raphael Samuel and Peter Ackroyd, all fed into a dynamic sense of the city as a 'palimpsest', or a lived experience. And in 1994 this new version of a cinematic London, haunted by the ghosts of past fictions as well as historical visitors, found expression in Patrick Keiller's remarkable film *London*, which forms an important reference point in both of the books under review.

The unseen and unnamed narrator of *London* and his companion Robinson are not only knowledgeable guides to the 'psychogeography' of the city, but are also by implication tireless walkers of its streets. And it is this sense of personal, corporeal engagement with the city's fabric that marks the new city film history. Brunsdon speaks of the experience of walking around London while researching her book as an integral part of the project, and of its impact on the book's structure – due to the 'resistance of the real … [and] the recalcitrance of the city to being textualised' (p. 15). Stephen Barber writes of Keiller's film 'tracing the contradictions and resistances of the now-vanishing filmic city' as a 'disappearing presence' (pp. 131-32). For Brunsdon, the film is also an ironic reclamation of 'landmark London', rendering familiar icons 'almost arbitrary' as its commentator vents his spleen against many aspects of the modern city and proposes alternative places of pilgrimage; while Barber stresses how much it reveals London as 'deeply unknown', with its long-take shots that 'carry a haunting sense of urban beauty and stillness' (p. 134). Both agree that it opens up a multiplicity of Londons, undermining any totalized single sense of 'the city'.

The journey is another key concept for penetrating the new cinematic city. Brunsdon's governing concept is of place in cinema as 'relational', meaning that 'each particular location in a film is rendered meaningful by its relation to the other locations' (p. 12), while these in turn have referential aspects which may be determined by the plot or by history (such as 'home' or Buckingham Palace). One of her most suggestive explorations is of the journey 'up West' that figures in a number of London-based films, where characters who live in the East End or more anonymous districts plan their trip 'West'. In Robert Hamer's bleakly atmospheric *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947), Googie Withers's barmaid Rose dreams of going from Bethnal Green to the West End with her lover, but this precisely remains a dream as the film stays firmly rooted in the East End, although it relies on audiences' familiarity with the traditional bright lights of the West End, as portrayed a decade later in Claude Goretta and Alain Tanner's *Nice Time* (1957). Increasingly during the 1950s, Soho and its association with the sex trade, gambling and criminality become the focus of filmic trajectories that end badly.

A highly original essay in *London Eyes* by Roland-François Lack, 'London circa sixty-six: the map of the film', also explores the topical significance of journeys. Its central focus is on Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966), a work he identifies as 'emblematic of London in the 1960s and central to the ciné-city canon' (p. 150). Lack's method is to plot the movements of characters in some fifty London-based films of the decade with great topographical precision (using an A-Z map of the period), exploring how these often exploit tourist clichés but also offer precise identifications of places that were significant at the moment of filming (and have since disappeared) or 'manipulations of reality' of varying degrees of plausibility. Taking his bearings from the analysis of Godard's use of Parisian places in Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion*,[7] and from the French tradition of a poetics of space, Lack brings us back to a more nuanced, contextualized understanding of *Blow Up*, seeing its protagonist Thomas as 'an allegory of the [modern] map-reading ciné-tourist' (p. 171), poignantly caught between the mysterious reality of his images and the unreality of the city around him.

The relationship of the real to the fictive is of course a vital thread in city film studies, and Brunsdon offers two persuasive readings of London noir films that usefully challenge the abstracting tendency in noir criticism, seeing locations as mere figurings of their characters' inner worlds or metaphysical tragedy. For *Night and the City* (1950), Jules Dassin famously discovered a range of London locations that had rarely if ever been seen on screen before, effectively transforming the city into a noir arena for Richard Widmark's doomed odyssey. The film is now highly regarded, even if it had a mixed reception on its first appearance, but Brunsdon's argument is that it represents more than just a demonstration of how effectively London could 'play noir'. It shows, she claims:

7 Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (London: Verso, 2002).

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quite precisely the double-faced West End centred on Piccadilly Circus … which has been a very strong tradition in the historical representation of London. There are two Londons in this film, and the way hey are mapped over each other makes it impossible by the end of the film, to see the first London, a public, tourist, landmark West End London, without understanding the way in which it is subtended by another London, one of graft, pay-offs and the hierarchies of the underworld. (p. 101)

In her matching study of Neil Jordan's *Mona Lisa* (1986), Brunsdon examines a later stage of the West End trope, as Simone's driver, George (Bob Hoskins), is groomed so that he can 'pass' in genteel West End settings, which Brunsdon illuminates with reference to studies of the evolving Cockney. But when Goerge plunges into a hellish Soho, searching desperately for Simone in a succession of peepshows and strip clubs, she judges this a case of 'alibied voyeurism', which allows us to look without guilt, shielded by George's innocence. Perhaps, but there is surely room for more debate about the ethics of Soho's erotic display in the many films and television dramas set there; and perhaps surprisingly Brunsdon has nothing to say on this issue about Michael Powell's seminally controversial *Peeping Tom* (1960).[8] However, what these and many other case studies build up is the sense that to watch London films should not be merely an exercise in nostalgia or geekish 'location spotting'; it should actually confront us with an image, an interpretation, which invites our engagement, especially if we are citizens of or visitors to London.

Brunsdon's often eloquently written and poetically structured book disclaims any attempt at comprehensiveness, and is greatly helped by its personal tone. Clearly the author has found its subject challenging much of her professional formation as a film scholar, feeling that its material is 'too close to home' or that her original aim of writing about 'ideas' on London and film has degenerated into list-making (which it has not). In fact, she ends with a palindromic return to St Pancras, where the book's opening chapter analyzes the 'impossible geography' of *The LadyKillers* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1955), pointing out that its house facing the station is one of countless images that, however counterfactual, contribute to our sense of 'what London is'. Returning to the area behind Kings Cross, once dominated by giant gas holders, where many sleazy scenes in London films have been staged, this 'key low-life site of landmark London' prompts an exploration of melancholy and the poignancy of place. This is perhaps the cumulative tone of the book, although it is clear that Brunsdon has also discovered reasons to be optimistic during her explorations, notably in her spirited defence of Carol Reed's *A Kid for Two Farthings* (1955) and the final evocation of the 'melodrama of everyday life' in Michael Winterbottom's *Wonderland* (1999).

By contrast, Cunningham and Barber's edited collection is both more ambitious and more uneven, with its twelve essays rather arbitrarily

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assigned to sections entitled 'Victorian and Edwardian London on the Page' and 'The Modern Age: London in Image'. Like any compendium on the inexhaustible city, it contains some curiosities and good things. In addition to the essays already mentioned, Roger Webster usefully compares three adaptations of Conrad's tale of London terrorism, *The Secret Agent*, concluding that Hitchcock's 1936 version, *Sabotage*, although least faithful to the novel, actually comes closest to creating a credible sense of imminent urban apocalypse while also retaining Conrad's vision of the fragmented 'monstrous town' in its spatial arrangement. Martin Dines and Jeremy Reed both evoke the centrality of the city to narratives of gay sexuality, the latter in terms of Derek Jarman's Soho. But perhaps most interesting of all is Sara de Freitas's exploration of dystopia as the dominant theme in London films, which she develops in an arc reaching from H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* to such films as *The Omen* trilogy (1976–81), *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002) and *Reign of Fire* (Rob Bowman, 2002). The last of these, de Freitas notes, evokes quite literally the mediaeval myth of warring dragons which is inscribed in London's coat of arms, recalling a persistent supernatural dimension that runs through London fictions. De Freitas is equally suggestive in her overview of the 'sociopathic criminal culture … chaotic, greedy and fascistic' (p. 180), which is recurrently portrayed in London crime films, linking this with another strand of Victorian dystopianism that drew heavily on the experience of the metropolis.

Although there is no discernible end to the making of books about London, cinematic London has been poorly served until recent years, despite the emergence of new institutions focused on the city's film heritage.[9] Indeed heritage has been the concern of what work has hitherto been disseminated, much of it devoted to recording the vanished or the disintegrating fabric of London's entertainment empires.[10] Now Brunsdon and the various contributors to *London Eyes* have made a welcome start on a new integration of the material with the cultural, not to mention the topographic and the psychic. But there are still many trajectories and genres remaining to be explored before the imagery of London is as fully understood as its writing.

Catherine Fowler, *Sally Potter* (Contemporary Film Directors). Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009, 154 pp.

Sophie Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter: a Politics of Love* (Directors Cuts). New York, NY and London: Wallflower Press, 2009, 256 pp.

LUCY BOLTON

In her introduction to Sophie Mayer's *The Cinema of Sally Potter*, Julie Christie describes *The Gold Diggers* as being 'like gold dust in the wind, motes that settle but don't form a cohesive whole' (p. ix). These words

9 London's Screen Archives: the Regional Network, supported by Film London, is fulfilling the role of a local film archive for the London region. See <http://filmlondon.org.uk/networks/lsa>; the London Screen Study Collection at Birkbeck carries on the research begun as part of the AHRC 'London Project' <http://londonfilm.bbk.ac.uk/about/project/>; and the new London Film Museum is developing a range of displays about the history of film personalities and production in London <http://www.themovieum.com/> [all accessed 25 June 2010].

10 See, for instance, Allen Eyles's books on Odeon cinemas, and other publications from the Cinema Theatre Association.

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convey the paradoxically elusive yet intense character of this particular film, and also suggest characteristics of Potter's filmmaking more generally – namely the extraordinary richness of forms and stories, and the rewards to be gained by engaged, contemplative spectatorship.

These two books on Potter together form a comprehensive appraisal of her work, each one compensating for any shortcomings in the other. Catherine Fowler's volume in the Contemporary Film Directors series (edited by James Naremore) sees the welcome inclusion of Potter alongside Kiarostami, Ferrara and Campion (amongst others) and is an introduction to the filmmaker and her films up to, but not including, *Rage* (2009). Fowler begins by describing and contextualizing the 'early, earnestly feminist, performance-artist side of Potter' (p. 2) and continues to stress her 'feminist intent' as a defining characteristic of her work (p. 16). By entitling the section on Potter's evolution as a 'Search for a "frame of her own"', Fowler situates the director firmly in a feminist tradition. For Fowler, Potter's films explore the tension for women between creativity and company, and Potter's onscreen observers become 'surrogate Sallys' in this regard (p. 25).

Fowler describes how Potter's films engage with theory and criticism, as she deconstructs and troubles the gaze with her 'ambivalent camera' (p. 28), the movement of which is 'designed to make seeing difficult' (p. 193). For Fowler, Potter's films have at their heart the desire to free women from the narrative conventions of patriarchal cinema, having an editing style and mise-en-scene that never objectifies or fetishizes women; rather, Fowler argues, Potter's women are free to explore female friendships and different power relationships, uncoupled, as it were, from narratives that prescribe heterosexual union.

Fowler sets up Potter as a fighting feminist filmmaker and cites the critical response to *The Tango Lesson* (1997) as an illustration of 'the unequal ground on which female directors have to build their careers' (p. 3). Fowler extends this need for battle-hardiness to the spectators of Potter's films: 'It seems only right, given the fighting spirit with which Potter has approached her calling, that those who watch and study her films should do battle with their preconceived notions of what cinema can and should be' (p. 4). This perspective suggests that there is something of the 'Potter apologist' about Fowler. This is evident more subtly when Fowler speaks of Potter's interest in 'the audio-visual attack' that cinema offers (p. 46) and in the discussions of Potter's perceived early problems with cinematic pleasure (p. 55). As if to demonstrate the validity of the battle, Fowler analyzes Potter's films and links them to her origins as a mixed-media performance artist and her collaborative relationships with other performers, such as Lindsay Cooper and Rose English. The integration of elements of live performance with film, Fowler argues, explains some of Potter's unconventional film form: 'breaking the frame, invading her audience's space and performative use of film language' (p. 20). Fowler discusses shot transitions, framing, space and colour, and she identifies several stylistic themes, such as Potter's driving, moving

camera, and swift edits (p. 31). Fowler draws out links between Potter's films, such as the dancing body and ideals of femininity, but also picks up on details specific to particular films that would bear further attention. For example, having identified a connection between Suzie and Lola (*The Man Who Cried* [2000]) and Mimi and Musetta (*Thriller* [1979]), Fowler comments upon Potter's use of music in both films, and her exploration of non-verbal language more generally; but she also observes the way in which 'Lola hesitates and fumbles with the back of her neck, a movement she often employs when she is lacking confidence' (p. 91). Observations such as this are somewhat fleeting, but their curtailment is sadly necessary in a book of this length and in this introductory series. Fowler's approach suggests that Potter's early radical political filmmaking is hard work all round, but her analysis demonstrates Potter's 'dual approach to theory and the wider world' (p. 34) through the explorations of Potter's accomplishment as a 'multi-media polymath' (p. 61), stressing the depth and breadth of her work, entailing 'looking differently and looking again' (p. 108).

Fowler raises the issues of non-verbal communication and dialogue with the audience in Potter's 'expanded' cinema, and Sophie Mayer further explores these ideas with her own 'expanded' criticism in *The Cinema of Sally Potter*. Julie Christie's introduction sets the tone for Mayer's approach. From Christie's admission that she considered *The Gold Diggers* 'terribly alternative', to her comments upon Potter's clothes, her laugh and her 'enormous style', the writing is generous, frank and personal. Mayer's confessional opening reveals the impact on her of seeing *Orlando* (1992) as a teenager: 'By opening my eyes to the idea that all art forms could change the individual and society, *Orlando* became part of a cavalcade of popular culture that altered my relationship with power and hierarchy in all its forms: not only gender and sexuality, but also nation, class and ethnicity' (p. 3).

Mayer, like Fowler, stresses the nature of Potter's filmmaking as collaborative – with composers, artists and producers, but also with viewers – and Mayer's book is testament to that particular relationship. Again picking up on the idea of non-verbal communication, Mayer draws on the idea that Potter's films develop ways of touching the viewer and that her use of film form, such as the closeup and rhythmic editing, enables the films to 'reach out and affect our bodies' (p. 6). Referring to the work of Laura Marks on film phenomenology and haptic visuality, Mayer describes Potter's films as becoming 'events that have happened to us' (p. 7).[1] Thus Mayer describes the revolutionary nature of *Rage* in cinematic terms as a refashioning of film, but also by confessing that it 'looks and feels like no other film I have ever seen' (p. 10).

Mayer alternates analysis of specific films with thematic chapters (Working, Moving, Colouring, Listening, Feeling and Loving), aiming to create a framework of dialogue, bookended by chapters on 'Becoming', parts 1 and 2. This notion of dialogue and respecting the other derives here from Martin Buber's *I and Thou*,[2] a book Potter reads onscreen in *The*

1 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000), and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

2 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923), trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958).

Tango Lesson by way of contrast with Pablo's narcissistic appreciation of Marlon Brando's biography. For Mayer, and for Potter, the relationship of one to another – being in two – is a political entity. As 'a spiral that keeps opening outward to the world', the exchange between two happens in Potter's film 'between characters, and between the film and the viewer' (p. 23). This exchange exists, according to Mayer, where the feelings or thoughts inspired by the film are taken out into the wider world by the receiver of the filmic gift. Mayer grounds her discussion in the editing, pace, sound and colour onscreen, believing that: 'Potter's films have the radical potential to restore love to its political efficacy' (p. 26).

Inspired by Potter's searching protagonists, Mayer declares her book to be about an 'inner exchange' between one viewer and the films, with the aim of circulating the films' gift (p. 25). This is where the concept of love comes in, not as the romantic love of the couple, but as something more political concerned with exchange, respect and carrying forward. In practice, this means situating *Thriller* alongside the 'rip in the mainstream' (p. 30) effected by contemporary social and cultural movements such as punk, The Sex Pistols and Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*: '*Thriller*'s Musetta … combines punk's performance energy and Carter's fascination with women who use their wits to survive' (p. 29). These seem to be more suitable artistic referents than the psychoanalytic work of Mulvey and others, which Potter saw as limiting in its discussion of women as lack (p. 31).[3] The dissection of narrative in *Thriller* reveals that, for Potter, 'The case is not closed' (p. 33); she sees beyond the analysis of lack to the possibility of alternative ways of being.

Having the space to develop points of close textual analysis at greater length than Fowler, Mayer considers Lola in the context of performance. For Mayer, Lola is always performing – even during sex and at the moment of death (p. 73), which may account for the nervousness identified by Fowler. Mayer considers other performing females alongside her, including the performance of female beauty by Jude Law as Minx in *Rage* (p. 80). This focus on performance enables Mayer to discuss how ideas are conveyed onscreen through cinematic means – colour, light, costume, speech – across Potter's films as evolving, connected and circulating.

Similarly, the chapter on colour ranges from the monochrome landscapes of *The Gold Diggers*, through *Orlando*'s sumptuous palette, to the skin colours of the talking heads from *Rage* and the backgrounds against which they are set. This approach draws out the significance of colour in Potter's work but also demonstrates how colour can be talked about as a matter of substance. There is a circulation here of meaning between filmmaker, writer and reader – as the colours in Potter's films are drawn together for discussion and thereby raised to a new status of meaning for the reader who can in turn re-view the films with new eyes. Mayer's observations are suggestive, not definitive: blue, for example, 'has something queer about it' (p. 118).

3 Here Mayer cites Potter in interview with Valentina Agostinis, 'Interview with Sally Potter', *Framework*, no. 14 (1981), p. 47.

This does not mean the book lacks rigour; rather it attempts to create a collaborative investigation of Potter's work along with its reader. Mayer develops the idea of listening as a self-effacing and apparently passive power, which enables a reconfiguration of authorship that circumvents the patriarchal oneness promulgated by the classic auteurists. Mayer likens Potter's filmmaking to a religious movement when she describes how she has 'intertwined protest and prayer in a kind of liberation theology' (p. 142). She also adopts the term 'auteure', as used by Corinn Columpar, to represent this new kind of (female) authorship, grounded in listening, hearing and observing, and offering up as a gift the filmic fruits of one's labour.[4]

Mayer's language is lyrical and poetic: 'History blows through Potter's films as a storm of language and music. The auteure is born aloft not by her power of annunciation, but her willingness to listen' (p. 156). This is not a standard consideration of authorship. It is a bold work that seeks to demonstrate the ways in which Potter operates as a non-standard filmmaker, whose reception is divided and at times misunderstood. This makes the book a challenging piece of work. It requires time and an open mind to let the ideas circulate, which is Mayer's stated aim. There are times when ideas come thick and fast, creating a forum of rapid allusion with myriad concepts, critics and details that are not always developed. There is repetition of ideas and descriptions across the chapters, but again this is the intended circulation of meanings and ideas. On occasion, this approach can feel rather disconnected, but it is neither scattergun nor whimsical – Mayer cites the cinematic evidence to support her claims.

Unlike the motes described by Julie Christie, Mayer's book does settle into a cohesive whole. Fowler ends with a well-structured interview with Potter and a comprehensive filmography, underlining this work's credentials as a solid place to start. But through Mayer's unconventional prose and provocative proposition a deeper appreciation of Potter's work can be attained.

Christopher Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema: an Aesthetic Approach*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, 504 pp.

CATHERINE O'RAWE

The mammoth size of this book is all the more striking due to the fact that it is, ultimately, a discussion of just three neorealist films, Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946), and Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). These films, which form the core of the neorealist corpus, have been the subject of endless critical attention since their release, and continue to attract new work of all sorts, both within and outside Italy.[1] Neorealist cinema has constituted for many years the foundational story of Italian cinema, to which critics inevitably, and at

4 Corinn Columpar, 'The dancing body: Sally Potter as feminist auteure', in Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis and Valerie Raoul (eds), *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), pp. 108–16.

1 See, in the anglophone context, Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism:*

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Rebuilding the Cinematic City (London: Wallflower, 2006); Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson (eds), *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema* (Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 2007); Robert Gordon, *Bicycle Thieves* (London: British Film Institute, 2008). In Italy critical work on neorealism is ongoing and voluminous: for a recent example, see Antonio Vitti (ed.), *Ripensare il neorealismo* (Pesaro: Metauro, 2008).

2 Steve Neale, 'Art cinema as institution', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1981), p. 26.

times obsessively, return. Identified many years ago by Steve Neale as 'the very paradigm of art cinema',[2] the prestige of neorealism has been constructed partly through its moral weight in documenting the Nazi occupation, the Resistance and the reconstruction of Italy, partly through its success internationally, and partly through its critical idealization by André Bazin and, later, Gilles Deleuze.

Christopher Wagstaff has here adopted an unconventional and defiantly idiosyncratic approach to these films and to this cinema: announcing his 'ruthlessly aesthetic approach' (p. 403), his book occupies a critical territory that lies somewhere between the aesthetic theory of Kant and the neoformalism of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. However, where Bordwell and Thompson's stylistic histories are richly grounded in discussions of industrial practice, Wagstaff prefers pure description:

> the theory from which [my critical procedure] starts is a remarkably banal one that is empirically verifiable, namely, that a film is 'an assembly guided by intentions'. The method employed is 'description'. … I proposed that the critic's objective description needs to account for the putting together of the assembly which, ideally, will generate hypotheses about the intentions of the assembler. Where those hypotheses coincide with the explicit and repeated declarations of the 'assembler'. … there are plausible grounds for believing that we have accurately described the assembly. (pp. 370–71)

Wagstaff's approach has the merit of moving us away from the 'reflectionist' approach that has dogged studies of neorealism, and Italian cinema in general, whereby filmic texts are only valuable because of the relationship they express to the profilmic, and it is certainly true that Italian leftwing criticism of the 1940s and of the Zhdanovist 1950s valorized these films precisely for their ideological content and measured all other production against them (while the Catholic centre-right government of Italy tried to suppress them). Yet it is telling that Wagstaff's text on many occasions expresses anxiety about his own approach, as he restates his position frequently and even extends it to a dogmatic stance, arguing in his analysis of the performances in *Paisà*: 'it may appear that I am giving a "reading" of *Paisà*: interpreting the film, saying what it means, and showing how this was, at the time, a representation of a felt reality. This is not what I am trying to do' (p. 233). We might read this anxiety symptomatically, as the author's expression of knowledge of the impossibility of his task, and he is clearly well aware that despite his attempt to bracket theories of authorship at the book's outset, the method is ultimately predicated on the knowability of the director's (and screenwriter's) intentions, and an awareness that those 'authors' are subjects positioned within ideology and history in particular ways.

The fascinating tensions within Wagstaff's work are thus between a *modus operandi* which is painstaking, forensic, reconstructive, often illuminating and provocative, and a cultural, aesthetic and industrial context that is invoked only sporadically, and that thus remains in shadow.

Wagstaff breaks down each film into its constituent parts, often into individual sequences that are minutely described and analyzed. His stylistic analysis is always interesting, such as, for example, his reading of the 'sloppy' lighting setups in *Rome, Open City*, which are contrasted with a contemporary Hollywood film on a Resistance theme, Howard Hawks's *To Have and Have Not* (1944). Further, using methods derived from those of Barry Salt, his recording of the average shot length of the films, and a comparison with other Italian and Hollywood films of the period, demonstrates that the three films he discusses had an ASL comparable to that of the average Hollywood film of the time, and certainly did not privilege the Bazinian long take. Similarly, he shows that *Rome, Open City* favours medium shots and medium closeups over any other type of shot, and certainly does not showcase the long shots that are assumed to be central to neorealism's aesthetic. That it is unclear how this information should fit into a broader stylistic history of the period is not entirely Wagstaff's fault, as Italian film history lacks the kind of detailed archival work on the evolution of technological practice (particularly in relation to photography, sound recording and lighting) from which histories of Hollywood have so benefited. When Wagstaff does address these kinds of issues he is obliged to fall back on statements (not always sourced) from some of the personnel involved; he suggests in relation to *Rome, Open City* that the poor quality of lighting might be because Rossellini hurried along the cinematographer Ubaldo Arata, adding that 'this would be compatible with what we know to have been Rossellini's impatience, at times, with the time it took Otello Martelli to set up the lights on *Paisà*' (p. 103). How we know this is never explained.

Wagstaff successfully elucidates what he terms the 'stylistic eclecticism' of *Paisà* and there are some lovely moments of analysis, such as his reading of the 'incoherent' lighting scheme of the opening section of the film, or how the roughness of the sound recording in the film's later parts works to disorient the viewer. His shot-by-shot breakdown of *Bicycle Thieves* will surely be used in teaching the film. He is less sure-footed, though, when he addresses the thematic (and melodramatic) recurrence of prostitution in *Paisà*, *Rome, Open City*, and many other films of this period. Whilst correctly pointing out that these films examine 'women's sexuality as an economic resource in a time when masculinity was impotent to sustain the world's productive equilibrium' (p. 135), he flatly states: 'this is not mere sensationalism, nor is it gender politics'. It is difficult to see how the obsessive recurrence of the female prostitute in postwar cinema is not, somehow, related to gender politics, and it appears that Wagstaff is here undone by his desire to banish ideology (and gender ideology in particular) from his reading. Danielle Hipkins has pointed to how an understanding of the ways in which techniques of melodrama work within *Paisà* can illuminate both the text's production of the prostitute as symptomatic figure, and neorealism's failure to give discursive space to women, despite the prevalence of such female figures.[3]

3 Danielle Hipkins, 'Were sisters doing it for themselves? The sister-prostitute and discredited masculinity in post-war Italian cinema', in Danielle Hipkins and Gill Plain (eds), *War-Torn Tales: Representing Gender and World War II in Literature and Film* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 81–104.

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The tensions that manifest themselves around the relation between form and ideology in the book are particularly interesting: in the first of the book's twenty-seven appendices, Wagstaff outlines his 'standard history of neorealism'. Here, and in the appendix in which he lists fifty-five 'neorealist' films (many of them films that borrow heavily from popular forms such as comedy, melodrama or noir), he shows a subtle understanding of how 'the institution of neorealism', produced by Italian and non-Italian critical discourse, has tried to mask the variety and fluidity of the production that has been labelled in that way. So it is all the more striking, then, that the body of the book restates several times an opposition between neorealism and so-called 'genre cinema', or between high and low culture. This apparent contradiction is indicative of the uncertainty felt by much Italian scholarship about the status and validity of neorealism as a critical construction. Although critics from the 1970s onwards in Italy have worked to problematize the distinctions between neorealism as a high mode or genre and the popular genres that it appropriates, it seems that the admonition of Bazin in his 1948 essay on neorealism – that 'unfortunately the demon of melodrama that Italian filmmakers seem incapable of exorcising, takes over every so often' – has had a long-lasting effect.[4] Along the lines of the reconsideration of melodrama by Christine Gledhill, it might be more appropriate to consider neorealism as a mode or modality that spans texts, periods and cultures rather than as a set of techniques, especially since, as Wagstaff demonstrates, those techniques, when broken down, are often at variance with our conception of them.[5] Much more work needs to be done to address the stylistic and generic continuities between neorealism and the huge body of films relegated to its margins because of their stylistic 'impurity' or their appropriation of 'feminized' modes such as melodrama.

The book will undoubtedly prove valuable to students, due to its close readings; equally, academic readers will find much of interest, but may be frustrated by the idiosyncratic style and methodology. Above all, the book demonstrates that the problem of neorealism, and how to account for it critically, still haunts Italian film studies.

Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer (eds), *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*. London: Routledge, 2007, 364 pp.

HOWARD FINN

In her introduction to the 2009 *Screen* fiftieth anniversary issue, Annette Kuhn noted that 'in reaction to the excesses of the era of militant theory' associated with the 1970s heyday of film theory, there is now 'a focus on the historical, the local and the specific' which has 'entailed a wholesale distaste for the essential activity of conceptualization, of *theorizing*'.[1] This focus on specific context is particularly marked in studies of national cinema, where there is a pervasive fear of theory as prone to

4   André Bazin, 'Cinematic realism and the Italian school of the liberation', in *What is Cinema?*, Volume II, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), p. 31.

5   Christine Gledhill, 'Rethinking genre', in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Hodder, 2000), pp. 221–43.

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misrepresenting, appropriating or distorting 'the other' and a preference for the cautious labour of research into the 'facts' of cultural specificity.

As is evident from its title, *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* is an avowed example of the privileging of context in studies of a national cinema, containing twenty-four informative new essays on a wide range of films by well-known commentators on Japanese cinema, each essay reading a particular film in terms of relevant social, economic and political circumstances. Given its expressed aims and approach the book is excellent, yet it might also be considered indicative of how the current stress on context gives rise to an increasingly formulaic kind of writing in which theorizing and speculation is severely circumscribed.

The editors introduce the collection with an overview of Japanese film studies, arguing that the field is going through a period of transition in which attention to specific historical context can help to overcome the universalist, essentialist and orientalist mistakes of the past. Phillips and Stringer acknowledge the efforts of earlier critics with necessary politeness given that several of those pioneers contribute to the present volume. Nevertheless, Donald Richie is seen as having been overly implicated in American Occupation ideology in his need to construct Japanese national identity as both exotic other and 'good neighbour' in the Cold War context of Asian communist expansion (p. 10). Joan Mellon and Audie Bock, meanwhile, are seen as having arguments 'simplified by a tendency to depend on reflectionist descriptions of how Japanese cinema apparently "mirrored" Japanese society' (p. 11). This is an ironic criticism given that, in practice, the principal approach of the essays in *Japanese Cinema* is to read the films as reflecting Japanese society at specific historical junctures – for example, Mori Toshie writes in her chapter on Mizoguchi's *Osaka Elegy* (1936): 'The film's realism then mirrors the stage that the modernisation process had reached at this point, and offers a considerable amount of detail on what people in a large city like Ōsaka were actually experiencing' (p. 40). The 1970s militant theorizing of Noël Burch is regarded by Phillips and Stringer as 'remarkable' but 'erroneous' in its blatant orientalism (pp. 10–11). In an instance of the devil having the best tunes, however, it could be argued that the most fruitful work on Japan and Japanese cinema has often been written from what would today be considered an orientalist perspective. Closely following the example of Roland Barthes's self-reflexive construction of Japan as cultural other in *Empire of Signs* (1970), Burch's *To the Distant Observer* (1979) constructed Japanese cinema as 'other' to Hollywood modes of cinematic representation. Burch argued that the true 'golden age' of Japanese cinema was not in the postwar period of international success, which he saw as overly accommodating to American and European modes, but during the period of militarism and war when directors were forced to develop original formalist aesthetics in conditions of repression and isolation.[2] Erroneous its central thesis may have been, but Burch's project was self-reflexive, related to a revolutionary ideological strategy (constructing modes of representation with which to counter American cultural

2 Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (London: Scolar Press, 1979).

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imperialism). Last but not least, it helped people to see many previously neglected films in a radically new way.

Phillips and Stringer's history of Japanese film studies is reworked by Abé Mark Nornes in a chapter which takes a wry look at successive critical attempts to 'explain' Ozu, focusing on interpretations of one particular scene – the epiphanic vase scene in *Late Spring* (1949). Richie's humanism and Schrader's transcendentalism are found to be universalist, auteurist and orientalist (pp. 81–82), while Burch provides an 'archetypal example of a discourse built on an "othering" of non-western culture' (p. 84). Bordwell and Thompson's formalist stylistics constitute a 'historical poetics' in which the traditional Japanese iconography in *Late Spring* is not to be 'exploited by culturalist or quasi-religious readings' but demystified and shown as serving 'to reconcile conservatism with the liberalism of the Occupation' (p. 85). Recent critics such as Eric Cazdyn and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto are seen as having drawn out the ideological complexity of that postwar occupation context more fully, but Nornes acknowledges that Yoshimoto believes there is a 'structure of feeling' manifest in *Late Spring* that cannot be reduced to its sociopolitical context (p. 86). Nornes concurs, and in an unexpected relapse into a previously rejected auteurism wonders if Ozu's aesthetics are all the product of the director's fetishistic personality, the pathology of a collector with a mania for order and limitation (p. 87). Having reached this impasse and remarking ruefully that in criticism today 'there may never be the kind of coherent dialogue evidenced in the Ozu criticism of old' (p. 88), Nornes ends his overview as Phillips and Stringer end theirs – with a call for a multiplicity of interpretations and approaches. But perhaps this is the main concern: does the emphasis on 'specific historical context' lead to an openness and diversity of approach? Does it not instead have a tendency to close off philosophical, aesthetic and psychoanalytic approaches?

In several essays in this collection it is possible to discern a tension between the requirement for grounded context and an interest in more speculative lines of thought. Freda Freiberg's chapter on Yamanaka's *Humanity and Paper Balloons* (1937) begins with a discussion of the celebrated final image of the film (a drifting balloon) as depicting the fleeting quality of existence and foreshadowing Yamanaka's own imminent death in Manchuria. She suggests that 'this sublime scene … evokes various levels of metaphorical interpretation … it transforms the heavy materiality of existence into lightness' (p. 50) and, by way of Barthes, goes on to endorse Burch's and Richie's accounts of Yamanaka's formalism as an expression of aesthetic otherness. But instead of pursuing her engagement with the power of the image and why it generates such metaphorical interpretations, Freiberg fears that 'in succumbing to these thoughts and feelings, we are, however, reading the film as the expressions of the thoughts and feelings of its "author"' (p. 51). Freiberg retreats into a useful but altogether safer discussion of 'context': historical facts about Yamanaka's collaboration with a leftist theatre troupe, this historical

context of collectivism presumably inoculating us against the perils of 'succumbing' to auteurism, aesthetic theory or existentialism.

By contrast, Donald Richie is unashamedly unreconstructed. In an essay on Mitsuo Yanagimachi's *Fire Festival* (1985) he looks at how the production context (pressure from the film's corporate backers) resulted in its thematic contexts (ecology, *Burakumin* prejudice, homosexuality) being repressed in the final film. For Richie this turned out to be a good thing: trimmed of its sociological issues, the film becomes a more mysterious and powerful evocation of the (animistic *Shintō*) gods of Japanese nature, achieving a transcendentalist aesthetic which Richie posits in auteurist terms via Dreyer, Bresson and Mizoguchi.

A sense of struggling against a reification of specific historical context is perhaps most tellingly felt in Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto's essay on Ōshima's *Cruel Story of Youth* (1960), which begins by sketching the film's context of the crisis over the US–Japan Security Treaty and the fashion for 'sun tribe films' of youthful rebellion, only to then argue that, for Ōshima, depicting context would have been complicit with a deterministic leftist ideology, bound up with 'victim consciousness' (p. 176), an ideology that had failed and that he rejected. Instead, according to Yoshimoto, Ōshima engages in a dialectical *negation* of context as a radical critique of reality and presently constituted subjectivities (pp. 177–78). The cinematic means for sustaining this endless (self) negation is an equally perpetual search for stylistic subversion, and as a result the film 'will therefore never cease to excite, provoke, and disturb its audiences, even those who remain unfamiliar with the particular political references and historical contexts depicted in it' (p. 178).

From the perspective of Japanese film studies, militant theory of the 1970s is often seen as a naive philosophical idealism which led to orientalist excesses and which has been replaced by solid and culturally sensitive research into the detail of specific historical context. But it could be argued that Marxist poststructuralism was, in part, a reaction against the perceived 'vulgar historical materialism' of a preceding Marxist orthodoxy and was an attempt to rethink the complex mediation between culture and its determinants by including aesthetics and subjectivity (phenomenological and psychoanalytical) in the equation. In other words, today's privileging of specific historical context, for all its undoubted virtues, may turn out to mark a return to the narrowness and predictability of a 'vulgar' historical materialism.

Steve Chibnall and Brian McFarlane, *The British 'B' Film*. London: British Film Institute/Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 356 pp.

SUE HARPER

Historians of British cinema have tended to concentrate on mainstream film provision – on those 'A' films which dominated production

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<div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl">reviews</div>

schedules and distribution arrangements. A great deal of revisionist work has been done on major studios and film texts, but Steve Chibnall and Brian McFarlane are at present the only critics to have taken the risk of writing the cultural and economic history of the 'B' film. This book follows on from Chibnall's *Quota Quickies*, which deals with the 1930s and the consequences of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act.[1] *The British 'B' Film* begins with World War II and ends in 1965, when legislative changes and industrial conditions put an end to the old structure of film programmes, with their 'A' and 'B' features and newsreels. It provides a way of answering the question: 'What *was* on with all those big-budget movies that dominate our notion of cinema history?' (p. x). Besides telling us *what* was provided, it also offers answers to the *why*, the *how* and the *where*.

1 Steve Chibnall, *'Quota Quickies': the Birth of the British 'B' Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2007).

The authors employ a wide variety of sources – journalism, interviews, publicity material, autobiographies and official records. Unusually for this type of book, they also undertake visual analysis and engage with debates about the relationship between film and society. Refreshingly, they write in a witty style which makes no use at all of those inductive, steamroller theories derived from Deleuze and others which sometimes (but mercifully with less frequency now) encumber film scholarship.

The British 'B' Film engages head-on with the issue of 'quality'. It is commonly argued that 'B' features are of minimal cultural significance and were only seen by a few; the apocryphal remark by Michael Balcon that Quota Quickies were only seen by cleaning ladies at their morning tasks did a great deal of damage in this respect. This book scotches once and for all the idea that artistic quality and cultural significance are coterminous. The preface of the book contains an engaging snapshot of a moment at Pinewood in late September 1960, when Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* was being filmed. As the whole panoply of American culture is rolled out on the back lot, its expense and reliance on foreign capital signals the future for the British industry. The authors remark:

> But in a tiny corner of the great studios, on Stage G, the past can actually be seen. Space has somehow been found for a small unit under old Etonian Alfred Shaughnessy, to make a film about a pantomime dame who is not quite what he seems. This is a species of British film-making whose days are truly numbered. This is a 'B' film. Here there is no Technicolor, no Cinemascope and no Stereophonic Sound: just monochrome, academy ratio and monaural music. (p. viii)

Here, in condensed form, is the book's main issue: that an important film form devoid of technological innovation and status was being forged on the margins. The authors proceed to map out the terrain of this cinema, delineate its personnel and speculate about its relationship to society at large.

The book lays out the paths open to 'B' feature producers during the war, and besides showing the range of, and determinants on, films which

were made, it valuably delineates the unmade projects and avenues that were not pursued: the 'rugged documentary', for example, was 'a road not taken' (p. 6). It shows how wartime exigencies affected studio space and rentals, and how, for a short period, second features were shown little and made less. And the authors provide a full account of the problems facing such films as Oswald Mitchell's sheepdog epic *Loyal Heart*, made in 1944 but only shown in 1946, in which 'the scenery and the dog are its only redeeming features' (p. 15). The book then goes on to lay out the economic and legislative conditions in the postwar period, and provides a rationale for the richness of 'B' film culture in the 1950s; it also accounts convincingly for its decline, in an argument which combines analyses of production, distribution and exhibition patterns.

The 'B' film was subdivided into various production types: travelogues and featurettes, as well as fictional film. Even the featurettes had subcategories – the intriguing wild animal featurette, as well as the domestic animal one. *Mate o' Mine* (T. J. Roddy, 1948) was the only film ever to attribute Alexander the Great with the tagline 'The more I see of men, the more I like my dog', and the ubiquitous Harold Baim made *These Happy Breeds* (1951), which quoted from the David Lean/Noel Coward film and from Shakespeare, but which was really about police dogs (p. 28). But 'B' fiction films also appeared in a wide range of genres. The authors present a very convincing analysis of the generic spread of the 'B' film, demonstrating conclusively that crime film dominated second features but that each genre – musical, romance and others – performed distinct ideological tasks.

While mapping out government attitudes to the 'B' film, the book also presents detailed evidence that those who made the films exhibited a particular *esprit de corps* – feisty, mutually supportive and endlessly inventive – because of the constraints under which they laboured. The book lays out the varying imperatives and policies of ACT Films, the Board of Trade, the Rank Organisation and the CEA (Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association) in order to locate the major players and to show how government and industry responded to the Eady Levy. It also distinguishes between the different US film agencies and their inputs and effects, and provides a clear linear narrative.

It might all sound a little dry, but the authors excel in putting flesh on the bones of an argument, distinguishing between the practices and productions of various studios – Merton Park, Butcher's, Tempean, The Danzigers, and so on – in a lively manner. They are also particularly astute in their discussion of the Hammer films, and make clear that the 'B' film had a dual function: both operating as a training ground for new talents (Terence Fisher, Ken Hughes, Lewis Gilbert) and providing a safe haven for ageing ones (Maurice Elvey, Leslie Arliss, Arthur Crabtree). The material on cinematographers and visual style is excellent, and the authors mount a tough argument about the visual codes of 'B' films and their relationship to dominant modes.

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In addition to identifying the personnel of the 'B' movie (the treatment of the stars is particularly suggestive), the book also makes a thematic analysis, examining the ways in which authority, work, deviance, sexuality, class and race are treated. The authors call attention to the challenge which the films make to everyday reality, noting the prevelance of nightclubs: 'Typically, the sound of Anglicised mambo played by bored combos accompanies the half-hearted routines of chubby dancers' (p. 255). These scenes' relationship to humdrum Britain is addressed, as is the films' larger ideological function. Ultimately, the authors imply that 'B' films address social issues in a less mediated and indirect manner than major feature films.

This book is surely the definitive account of its field. It will be required reading for those who want to come to terms with the richness of British film culture, with those residual and despised strands which are such a key component of the whole, and with the economic imperatives which drove production in certain periods. It helps us to conceptualize the relations between capital and culture in a new way, and combines rigorous scholarship with a willingness to take interpretative risks. It is a major achievement.

Marc Augé, *Casablanca: Movies and Memories*, trans. Tom Conley. Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 104 pp.

PETER WILLIAM EVANS

Casablanca, few need reminding, is one of the jewels of the cinema. Put together, on the evidence of those who worked on the film, in what seems an incredibly ad hoc basis, it succeeds in giving us performances, dialogue, atmosphere and content as fresh and compelling now as at the time of its first release almost seventy years ago. Unforgettable are the hardened features of Bogart's embittered Rick, the soft glamour of Bergman's love-torn Ilse, and the array of secondary players who almost steal the show: Claude Rains's jaunty, corrupt, but ultimately redeemable policeman, Sidney Greenstreet's fez-wearing gargantuan proprietor of the 'Blue Parrot', Dooley Wilson's *As Time Goes By*-playing pianist, and all the other characters holed up or drawn like doomed but hopeful moths to the bright lights of Rick's Café Americain, 'waiting, waiting, waiting', as the lugubrious voiceover puts it, for visas of transit to war-free zones or for resolution of their uncertain destinies. The dialogue ranges from the kitsch but, in the circumstances, somehow apposite sentimentality of Ilse's wondering whether the sounds she hears are cannon fire or the beating of her heart, to the cynical humour of Rick's explanation to Captain Renault that he came to Casablanca for the waters. The film's screenplay has become a treasure trove of quotes for layman and cinephile alike.

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Marc Augé, *Casablanca: Movies and Memories*, trans. Tom Conley. Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 104 pp.

PETER WILLIAM EVANS

Casablanca, few need reminding, is one of the jewels of the cinema. Put together, on the evidence of those who worked on the film, in what seems an incredibly ad hoc basis, it succeeds in giving us performances, dialogue, atmosphere and content as fresh and compelling now as at the time of its first release almost seventy years ago. Unforgettable are the hardened features of Bogart's embittered Rick, the soft glamour of Bergman's love-torn Ilse, and the array of secondary players who almost steal the show: Claude Rains's jaunty, corrupt, but ultimately redeemable policeman, Sidney Greenstreet's fez-wearing gargantuan proprietor of the 'Blue Parrot', Dooley Wilson's *As Time Goes By*-playing pianist, and all the other characters holed up or drawn like doomed but hopeful moths to the bright lights of Rick's Café Americain, 'waiting, waiting, waiting', as the lugubrious voiceover puts it, for visas of transit to war-free zones or for resolution of their uncertain destinies. The dialogue ranges from the kitsch but, in the circumstances, somehow apposite sentimentality of Ilse's wondering whether the sounds she hears are cannon fire or the beating of her heart, to the cynical humour of Rick's explanation to Captain Renault that he came to Casablanca for the waters. The film's screenplay has become a treasure trove of quotes for layman and cinephile alike.

The effects of language, in a script begun by Julius and Philip Epstein but completed by Howard Koch, play a pivotal role in the special qualities of *Casablanca*, and help mark indelibly the true or false memories – both of the film itself and of the place and time of its viewing – of all who have ever seen this film. Marc Augé, who first saw *Casablanca* at the age of eleven or twelve, uses the film not only as a trigger for reminiscence about its intrinsic merits but also as a way of piecing together the fragments of his own life. This essay is an intricate tapestry of personal and cultural memory and film criticism, but Augé warns the reader in the second epigraph: 'This text is not an autobiography, but more like the "montage" of a few memories. I could have chosen other memories – or another montage'. The warning is instructive. On the one hand it places the text in the tradition of modern confessional narratives, while on the other it points to a truth often articulated by filmmakers, many of whom – Buñuel, for instance – have insisted that the art of film is created in the cutting room. There, the filmmaker imposes an order on inchoate footage to deliver one of infinite possible versions of the same story. As Augé 'plays it' again, returning to the Latin Quarter as an adult to view *Casablanca*, his meditations on past and present viewings of the film are of as much interest to the film scholar as to the psychologist, cultural historian or ethnographer. The passages on the selective processes of memory, on reception, on identification and on the meanings of stars, performance and character, are expressed with a fluency and elegance uncluttered by critical jargon. Some observations, though, are contentious, such as when Augé claims that 'To see the film again … can be the occasion for regaining forgotten episodes, but also for measuring the difference between the memory image, which has lived its own life, and that of the screen, that has not changed an iota' (p. 10). And yet, though the screen image has remained fixed, surely its meanings have changed. Augé's view seems to contradict Borges's point in his short story, 'Pierre Menard, author of Don Quixote', that if *Don Quixote* were rewritten today respecting every word of the Cervantes original, its seventeenth-century meanings would be overridden by its modern ones.

Augé is on less disputable territory when he claims the film can be used as a memory stick not to relive but to hold on to the past. Thinking of *Casablanca*, as of his favourite movie stars – Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Errol Flynn, James Stewart, Gene Tierney, Kim Novak and others – returns him to his childhood. To watch a film well is to adopt the child's perspective. The roles played by these stars, and not the individuals who breathed life into them – subject like all mortals to decay and death – are fixed, even if, as in *Casablanca*, the themes of the films they appeared in often confirmed rather than alleviated the uncertainties of everyday life. This interest in stars and spectatorship leads to meditation on questions of identification which, in line with the views of other film theorists, Augé defines in relation to attachments formed between spectators and not simply with characters but situations.

Underlying these reflections there is a constant – and what in his excellent afterword Tom Conley calls an oblique – treatment of trauma.

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Even though little sense of loss or of guilt drives Augé to settle accounts with his country's oppressors, various passages, as Conley notes, do become the settings for displaced treatment both of the Nazi occupation and the Algerian war and their ramifications. Through 'preterition', Augé's memories of a pig squealing while being slaughtered simultaneously recognize and deny childhood trauma. Conley's commentary usefully situates the ideas in Augé's *Casablanca* essay in the context both of his other work, especially *Les Forms de l'oubli*, and of wider psychoanalytical, ethnographic and philosophical writing on trauma, memory and audience reception. He picks up on some of the most interesting features of Augé's thought-provoking guide not only to a great film but to the lived experiences of an expert chronicler of an interwoven personal and cultural history of postwar France. Not a cinephile but a self-styled 'frustrated Proustian', Augé packs into an enthralling essay reflections on the complex and mixed responses of film viewing, pen portraits of fascinating relatives and comparisons with literary masterpieces like Racine's *Bérénice*, while articulating the collective hopes, fears and uncertainties of past and present times prompted by viewings of *Casablanca.*

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Notes to Contributors

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Notes and references, which should be kept to a minimum, should be on an automatic numbering system. Style for citations of written sources is as follows:

1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietrapaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets: *A bout de souffle*/*Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

Where such information is relevant to the argument, details of production company and/or country of origin may also be included: *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros, US, 1945)

References to *television programmes* should be dated from the year of first transmission, and, in the case of long-running serials, the duration of the run should be indicated. Details of production company, transmitting channel, country, etc should be supplied where relevant: *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1961–)

Where writers or producers are credited their role should be indicated: *Where the Difference Begins* (w. David Mercer, BBC, 1961)

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